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ROOKWOOD:

A ROMANCE.

I see how Ruin, with a palsied hand,
Begins to shake our ancient house to dust.

Yorkshire Tragedy.

BY

W. HARRISON AINSWORTH.

FROM THE SECOND LONDON EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

PHILADELPHIA:
CAREY, LEA & BLANCHARD.

1834.

granted, unless he sees some especial reason for believing to the contrary.

As may be supposed, I am far from anxious that the favourable judgment already pronounced upon my essay should be reversed. It would be an ill compliment to my judges, and but a poor one to myself, were I to entertain any such inclination. At the same time, I cannot help thinking that some little partiality has been exercised in my behalf. My success, such as it has been, has been owing more to the choice of subject than to its manner of treatment. A romance was evidently wanted, and the public were ready to receive the first that appeared with open arms: at this fortunate conjuncture mine was ushered into the world. There is a tide in the affairs of literature as in all else, which I conclude, I have taken at the flood; and utilitarian as may be the pervading spirit of the present age, it is clear that a very strong feeling still exists in some quarters, in favour of good old Romance. Hence the flattering reception of the present attempt.

I may perhaps be allowed in this place to obtrude a few words respecting the highway-man, who cuts so conspicuous a figure in the following pages. Turpin, so far as he goes, is a pure invention of my own; and whatever opinion I may entertain, as to the feasibility of his ride to York, I have had nothing beyond oral tradition to go upon. That performance is still a matter of credence in Yorkshire and some of the neighbouring counties. Turpin, as I have elsewhere stated, was the hero of my boyhood. I had always a strange passion for highwaymen, and have listened by the hour to their exploits, as narrated to me by my father, and especially to those of "dauntless Dick," that chief "minion of the moon." One of his adventures in particular, the ride to Hough Green, (for Turpin's feats were always *equestrian*), which took especial hold of my fancy, I have recorded in song. When a boy I have often lingered by the side of the deep old road, in which this robbery was committed, to cast wistful glances into its mysterious windings, and when night had deepened the shadows of trees, have urged my father on his journey from a vague apprehension of a visit from the ghostly highwayman. And then there was the Bollin and its shelvy banks, which Turpin cleared at a bound—the broad meadows, over which he winged his flight—the pleasant bowling-green at Hough, where he produced his watch to the Cheeshire Squires, with whom he was upon terms of intimacy—all brought something of him to mind. No wonder, that, in after-years, in selecting a highwayman for a hero, I should choose my old favourite Dick Turpin. But Dick was not the only vagrant hero of my boyhood. I had always a sneaking liking for Jack Shepherd, who was a not less engaging personage, in his way, than Turpin, and one day I may present the world with his *Autobiography*, which happened singularly enough to fall into my possession. But while I confess to Turpin being an old favourite, I fear I can scarcely maintain absolute right to him. The appearance of Mr. Bulwer's

PREFACE

TO

THE SECOND EDITION.

THE favour with which this Work has been received has not been more unexpected than gratifying; and although I am no great lover of prefaces in a general way, and look upon them for the most part, as matter of supererogation, I should indeed be wanting in courtesy and proper sense of obligation, were I to neglect the opportunity now afforded me of expressing my acknowledgments. The present revised edition will, I trust, be found somewhat more worthy of approval than its predecessor. The pruning knife has been used with no sparing hand; but though much has been removed, much I am aware, still remains that was held to be objectionable in the original construction of the story, but which I have found it impossible to obviate. It would have been a less difficult task to re-write the book than partially to remodel it; just as it is easier to build a new house than to repair an old one. I have contented myself with taking down a useless wing or so—with stopping up a window here and there, that looked upon nothing—and having brushed up my tarnished furniture and put my crazy structure somewhat in order, I solicit the reader, with the best grace I can, to do me the favour to ramble through it, in my company. I can show him an antique gallery of portraits—of “undoubted originals,” some scraps it may be of faded arras, and a sketch or two of characters not so far removed from his own time. But he must so far preserve his good breeding, as not to ask me any questions which I may not be prepared to answer; for I am one of those persons who like to have all the talk to themselves—and but seldom condescend to explain anything satisfactorily, especially when interrupted. The reader must therefore content himself with being as credulous as he can contrive to be, and take all for

granted, unless he sees some especial reason for believing to the contrary.

As may be supposed, I am far from anxious that the favourable judgment already pronounced upon my essay should be reversed. It would be an ill compliment to my judges, and but a poor one to myself, were I to entertain any such inclination. At the same time, I cannot help thinking that some little partiality has been exercised in my behalf. My success, such as it has been, has been owing more to the choice of subject than to its manner of treatment. A romance was evidently wanted, and the public were ready to receive the first that appeared with open arms: at this fortunate conjuncture mine was ushered into the world. There is a tide in the affairs of literature as in all else, which I conclude, I have taken at the flood; and utilitarian as may be the pervading spirit of the present age, it is clear that a very strong feeling still exists in some quarters, in favour of good old Romance. Hence the flattering reception of the present attempt.

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admirable "*Paul Clifford*" awakened all my youthful enthusiasm for the *Knights of the Cross*; and I then bethought me of my predilections in favour of Turpin. But the *Road* had been previously taken; and all I could do was to stop any stray passenger, who had escaped the vigilance of my leader, and bid him "deliver." I now willingly surrender my spoils. Wayward and unworthy offspring as he may be, Mr. BURWICK must, nevertheless, share in the paternity of Turpin, and set him down as a reflection of the same creative pencil which depicted in such breathing colours a Thornton—a Houseman—or a Clifford: unless, indeed, disdaining him altogether, he should prefer adding him to the "*Disowned*."

Before I quit the subject of Turpin, I cannot help alluding to certain strictures which have been passed upon me, for the introduction of the Highwayman, in the following pages. They are from the pen of an ancient gentlewoman, a very near relation to the celebrated old lady, known as my "*Grandmother*;" whose criticism upon Lord Byron has rendered her notorious throughout the land. In a kindred spirit with the review in the *British*, are the following remarks which appeared in a recent number of the *Weekly Dispatch*:—

"One of the Readers of Rookwood" is informed, that we have not reviewed that work, because, while we can but respect the talents of the author, we did not choose to extend the circulation of a book which is certainly of a mischievous tendency, as it invests a *ruffianly murderer and robber with a chivalrous character, utterly undeserved, and in fact, entirely false*. But, as we are informed that this work is pronounced in the fashionable slang of the day, "a love of a book," (!!) that it is perused with admiration by the higher classes, and that some of its scenes are about to be dramatised, we feel called upon to take some notice of a *literary prostitution* which deforms the pages of one of the *clearest works we have perused for a long time*. We are sorry that Mr. Ainsworth should have chosen that *drunken, and even dastardly ruffian Dick Turpin, the highwayman—a wretch stained with almost every crime that can disgrace humanity—as one of the heroes of this tale* (!) The ride of Turpin from London to York, which Mr. Ainsworth has described in such glowing, and indeed, poetical style, and on which he has wasted powers that should have been devoted to something really worthy of the pen of a man of genius, is a very *doubtful event, which rests on no authority whatever*; and even had the feat been performed, as described, *on a single horse* (!) *what is there to admire in the tale of a scoundrel outlaw thus torturing a noble animal to save his own rascal carcass from the gallows?* This Turpin, *whom half the town are now taught by Mr. Ainsworth to admire as a knight of chivalry*, was a native of Essex, a butcher by trade, who commenced his career of plunder by stealing sheep and oxen, which he slaughtered in his own house. Being detected in this species of roguery by the tracing of some hides which he had sold to persons in London, he next turned smuggler—then deer stealer, and soon after became a burglar. Breaking into the house of a decrepid

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BOOK THE FIRST.

CHAPTER 1.

I saw great Satan like a sexton stand
With his intolerable spade in hand.

CHARLES LAMB.

WITHIN the deep recesses of a vault, the last abiding place of an ancient family—many generations of whose long line were there congregated—and at midnight's dreariest hour, two figures might be discovered, sitting, wrapt in silence as profound as that of the multitudinous dead around them. Beings of this nether world they seemed, yet so moveless was the attitude of each, so breathless the repose maintained, and so shadowy and fantastical the appearance of the figures themselves, as imperfectly revealed in the *clair-obscur*, occasioned by the light of a single candle struggling with the gloom, that had any human eye gazed upon them, the impression produced upon the spectator's mind would doubtless have been (if, perchance, with less of superstition, he had not put a construction equally horrible upon the meeting), that the objects he beheld were embodied spirits of the departed, which had burst the leaden bondage of the tomb, and were still hovering nigh the place of their imprisonment.

So far as it could be discerned, the cemetery was of antique construction, and of no inconsiderable extent; its walls and roof were of solid stone masonry, the latter rising in a wide semicircular arch, to it might be the height of some seventeen feet, measuring from the centre of the ceiling to the ground floor. The sides of the sepulchre were subdivided, by thin walls of stone, into ranges of low, narrow, but deep compart-

ments, adapted to the reception of the dead. The entrance to each recess consisted of a door-way, surmounted by small, obtusely-pointed arches, resting upon slender pillars, also of stone; the spandrills between each being filled up with a variety of escutcheons, shields, and other trophies and inscriptions. There were no doors to these recesses; and within might be traced huge heaps of coffins, reared pile upon pile, the accumulation of ages, packed with a prodigality worthy of a miser's stores, one upon another, till the floor groaned with the weight of lead; and in some instances the lower layers had been crushed and flattened by the superincumbent mass. Numerous, however, as were these receptacles, the proportion of bodies exceeded their capabilities; and in the further extremity there was an additional range of coffins, which could not be included in the cells, encroaching upon the limits of the vault, and attesting, by their increase, dread ravages of the Destroyer.

Depending from a hook, fixed in one of the stone pillars previously described, hung a rack of old time-out-of-mind hatchments, seemingly placed there in solemn mockery of the sunken greatness, the fall whereof they so eloquently bespoke. Stained and tarnished was their once flattering emblazonry—tattered and thread-bare their once spotless quarterings—even their triumphant *Resurgam* was obliterated and effaced, as if Hope itself had been annihilated.

Another remarkable feature of this phantasmagorical picture should not be unnoticed. In the centre of the chamber loomed the ghostly outline of the erect effigies of an armed warrior, Sir Ranulph Rookwood, the builder of the mausoleum, and the founder of the family that slept the sleep of death within its walls. Wrought in black marble, of the size of life, this stern, and sable statue, of rare workmanship, and some antiquity, differed from most monumental sculpture, in that the posture chosen for the warlike figure was erect and life-like. The warrior was represented as sheathed in a complete suit of plate armour, decorated with the armoial surcoat, and grasping the pommel of a weighty curtal-axe, his usual weapon of defence; a conically-formed helmet rested upon his brow, revealing his harsh but commanding features; the golden spur of knight-hood graced his heel, and beneath, enshrined in a costly marble sarcophagus, slept the mortal remains of what had once been one of the "sternest knights to his mortal foe that ever put speare to the rest."

Nor should the effect of the light and shade, within the vault, pass unobserved.

admirable "*Paul Clifford*" awakened all my youthful enthusiasm for the *Knights of the Cross*; and I then bethought me of my predilections in favour of Turpin. But the *Road* had been previously taken; and all I could do was to stop any stray passenger, who had escaped the vigilance of my leader, and bid him "deliver." I now willingly surrender my spoils. Wayward and unworthy offspring as he may be, Mr. Bulwax must, nevertheless, share in the paternity of Turpin, and set him down as a reflection of the same creative pencil which depicted in such breathing colours a Thornton—a Houseman—or a Clifford: unless, indeed, disdaining him altogether, he should prefer adding him to the "*Disowned*."

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old lady at Loughton, some of the gang were inclined to believe her assertion that she had no money; but Turpin, with his own hands, actually placed the helpless old lady on the fire, and held her there till the horrible tortures she was enduring compelled her to disclose where the property was concealed. After several other acts of burglary, accompanied, as is usual among such wretches, by beastly drunkenness, Turpin became a highwayman, and robbed many persons; in connection with another ruffian named King; yet when a resolute gentleman named Bayes seized this King, Turpin, in his trepidation, shot his friend instead of Bayes, and then rode off, suffering his bosom friend and associate to be captured by a single man. King died about a week afterwards, denouncing Turpin as a coward.

What a thing for the hero of a fashionable novel! Turpin murdered a man in Epping-forest, but was at length happily brought to justice, and hanged at York for horse-stealing, April 7th, 1739. Now, is it not degrading to men of learning and genius to debase their talents by enlarging on the apocryphal exploits of a brutal wretch like this and to write flash songs too, full of the cant phrases and vulgar slang, which thieves have invented for the purpose of concocting their schemes of depredation without being understood by any casual listener? "Tis a vile pandering to a depraved taste!"—*Weekly Dispatch*, May 18th.

Now, considering for what sort of readers the good old dame has to cater, it must be confessed, that she acted with becoming prudence in refusing to extend, by any efforts of her own, the circulation of a work of a character likely to be prejudicial to them; but it may be questioned, after all, whether dignified silence would not have better answered her purpose. Garrulity, however, is the chartered privilege of old age, and the ancient lady of the *Dispatch* cannot be expected to be exempt from the common failings of humanity. This respectable matron has been led into these bitter invectives against Turpin, chiefly because he maltreated another "decrepid old dame at Loughton," who was no doubt an immediate connection of her own, and in whose sufferings she evidently feels the sincerest sympathy. *Hinc ille lachrymæ!*—hence the opprobrious epithets with which she has loaded his name. "A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind," and old ladies are not to be teased with impunity. Savage as it may at first appear, this action of Turpin's may have been only a harmless jest. The old lady refused to disclose where her treasure was concealed, and he had recourse to an ingenious stratagem, in order to arrive at the truth; but whether any, and what discovery was made her relative of the *Dispatch* omits to mention, and one can only surmise as to the result. Again, the old lady objects, and most vehemently, to Turpin's having ridden to York on a 'single horse,' thinking very properly that the feat would have been more marvellous, had he performed it like Mr. Ducrow, on *four abreast*! Dick however took things as he found them.

The worthy old creature has mixed up so much honey with her

or root, as well as from exposure to the sun and "skyeey influences;" but the result was an embrowned swarthinness of hue that would have done credit to the tawniest Gitano of Andalusia, even with the true Morisco blood purpling in his veins. His figure, when raised, was tall and masculine, and though slight, indicated great personal vigour, and muscular resources, and but for the recklessness of manner, and unrestrained carriage and deportment heretofore noticed, his appearance might be designated as prepossessing and attractive in the extreme.

At the precise moment when our narrative commences, both parties were motionless; not a word was spoken by either—scarce a breath drawn. It was a silence befitting the place. In the mean time we shall take advantage of the pause (as it must evidently have been), to hazard a slight preliminary account of the old man, with the great, grey, glassy eyes.

Peter Bradley, of Rookwood, in the county of York, where he had exercised the vocation of sexton, for the best part of a life already drawn out to the span ordinarily allotted to mortality, was one of those odd, grotesque, bizarre caricatures of humanity, which it occasionally delighteth our inimitable George Cruikshank to limn. So attenuated in the region of the legs and arms, as scarcely to remove him from absolute identity with the skeleton society he so much affected, Peter's unnatural length and lankiness of limb, combined and contrasted with his round dropsical-looking paunch, puffed out to a very pincushion plumpness, made him no inapt representative of a huge, bloated, and overgrown spider. Totally destitute of hair, his bald head reminded one of a bleached scull, allowing for the wrinkled furrows in the forehead, and thick beetle brows, that projected like the eaves of a barn; his hands were lean, long, and skinny, as the Ancient Mariner's; his fingers spread out like claws; but after all, his eyes were his most remarkable feature; "like the toad, ugly, and venomous, he bore a precious jewel in his head;" and, like that noxious reptile, his eyes were large, lambent, and luminous, though cold as the fire of an *ignis fatuus*, and grey as the slaty hue of earliest day-break. And then his laugh! that hollow chuckling laugh, distinguishable from all other laughter by an occasional wheezing choke, which threatened, during its paroxysm, to terminate the existence and merriment of the cachinnator, at one and the same time; this laugh had, besides, something so horrible about it, that, though seldom heard, it never failed, when indulged in, to excite a shuddering response in the audi-

tor, whoever the luckless wight might be. It was a something between the gibbering of a ghoul and the grin of an hyena.

The inward man corresponded with his outward appearance. His soul was in his spade. He was essentially a man of graves—"of the earth, earthy;" of the dead, deathly. Habitual contact with the mould, and the mouldering, had, so to speak, mildewed and worm-eaten his better sensibilities, crusting his mind "as with a scurf, and turning the wholesome current of his blood to black and melancholic bile. Something akin to nothingness he seemed, and yet endowed with animation—a connecting link betwixt the breathing body and the bony corpse—Materiality and Immateriality in one.

The night-mare Life in Death was he,
Who thickens men's blood with cold.

The church-yard might be called his domain—the tomb his dwelling-place—the charnel-house his museum of rarities; and he displayed as intimate an acquaintance with the relics of the latter, as his brother of the spade did with the scull of that "mad rogue Yorick, the king's jester;" and exhibited as much assurance in affixing a name or a date to a "chapless maxzard," or fragmentary bone, as any *savant* of them all could do, in illustrating the fossil tusk of a mammoth, the giant jaw of the mastodon, or other incomprehensible remnant of the extinct creation of the Antediluvian World.

Wearied with the prolonged silence, Peter was the first to speak. His voice was harsh and grating as a rusty hinge.

"Another glass," said he, pouring out a modicum of the pale fluid.

His companion shook his head.

"It will keep out the cold," continued the sexton, pressing the liquid; "and you, who are not so much accustomed as I am to the damps of a vault, may suffer from them. Besides," added he, sneeringly, "it will give you courage!"

"Courage!" echoed the other, raising his head, while the flash of his eye resented the implied reproach.

"Ay, courage!" retorted the sexton; "Nay, never stare at me so hard, man. I doubt neither your courage nor your firmness; but as both may be put to the test to-night, I see no great harm in making certainty sure; and therefore 'tis that I press the glass upon you. Well, as you please, I don't want to poison you—this is no doctor's stuff—no damned decoction, or mixture, but honest, wholesome gin, distilled before you were born or thought of. 'Tis as harmless as mother's milk, and as

mild ; and so it should be, for it has lain more years in this vault than you can number to your head, grandson Luke ; and time is a great improver of liquor, whatever it may be of women. Here in this vault, my cellar, as I call it, hath it been hoarded these two-and-thirty years. But if you won't drink, I will. Here's to the rest eternal of Sir Piers Rookwood. Thou wilt say amen to that pledge, Luke, or thou art no offspring of his loins," and having once again emptied the beaker, he replenished it, and handed it to his grandson.

"Why should I reverence his memory," answered Luke, bitterly, refusing the proffered potion, "who showed no fatherly love for me ? He disowned *me* in life—in death I disown *him*. Sir Piers Rookwood was no father of mine."

"He had at least the reputation of being so ; but thou art, doubtless, better informed," returned the Sexton, "than I can possibly be on a subject that so nearly concerns thyself. Whose son art thou then ?"

"Whose ? Do I hear thee ask the question ?"

"Certainly thou dost, and repeat it ; Whose son art thou ?"

"Thy daughter's, Susan Bradley ?"

"That I know ; but thy father ?—for I presume thou *hadst* a father,"—asked the sexton, with a sneer.

"Well," returned Luke, "since it must be, and thou hast said it, he was my reputed father. Father !—ha ! the name sounds strange in my ears ; and with Sir Piers 'twas but the name, and scarce even that."

"He was as surely thy father, as Susan Bradley, thy mother, was my daughter," rejoined the sexton.

"And, surely," cried Luke, impetuously, "*thou* needst not boast of the connexion !—'Tis not for thee, old man, to couple their names together—to exult in thy daughter's disgrace and thine own dishonour ! Shame ! shame—speak not of them in the same breath, if thou wouldst not have me invoke curses on the dead. I would be at peace with him now."

"Reverential prayers and tears were fitter, methinks, than curses from thy lips," persisted the sexton, anxious it would seem to rattle the wound he had inflicted, "at a season like the present."

"Prayers and tears !" vociferated Luke, "my prayers would turn to curses, my tears to blood ! I have no reverence (whatever thou may'st have) for the seducer—for the murderer of my mother."

"Murderer !" repeated the sexton, apparently startled, and affecting astonishment—"Thou hast choice store of epithets, good grandson, Sir Piers a murderer !"

"Tush!" answered Luke, indignantly, "pretend not to be ignorant. Thou hast better knowledge of the truth or falsehood of the dark tale which has gone abroad respecting my mother's fate than I have; and unless report has belied thee foully, hast had substantial reasons for keeping sealed lips on the subject. But whether she died of a broken heart, broken by his perfidy—whether she fell a victim to remorse—to despair—her crushed spirit, sinking under the pressure of penitential sorrow for her crime, a crime of which he was the author and origin—whether more subtle and efficient means were taken to remove her—may rest in doubt, vague and uncertain as are hopes of hereafter. Yet this much is assured; that he, Sir Piers Rookwood, was the primary cause of her death; and in effect, if not in intent, her destroyer."

"Sorrow never broke Susan's heart," said the Sexton with a ghastly grin; "die as she might, she died impenitent."

"Her sin then rest with him—her blood cries out for vengeance."

"Vengeance belongeth to the Lord," returned the Sexton. "Leave Sir Piers to settle his account elsewhere. I warrant me he will not want thy assistance to help him towards the brink of the pit that is bottomless. And now seeing that he is gone, bury thy hatred with him; let not thy anger reach beyond the grave. Say thou forgivest him."

"For myself, I freely and fully forgive him; though to me he hath ever been the worst of enemies."

"Why, that is right and fairly spoken, though thou art still far from a fair understanding of thy case, grandson Luke, and givest vent to idle fumings at imaginary wrongs."

"No more of this," returned Luke impatiently.

"At what hour did Sir Piers Rookwood die?"

"He died on Thursday last, in the night time; but the exact hour I know not."

"Of what ailment?"

"Neither do I know that. His end was sudden, yet not without a warning sign."

"What warning?" inquired Luke.

"Neither more nor less than the death-omen of the house. You look astonished. Is it possible you have never heard of the ominous Lime tree, and the fatal bough?—why, 'tis a common tale hereabouts, and has been for centuries: any old crone would tell it thee. Peradventure thou hast seen the old avenue of lime trees leading to the hall, near a quarter of a mile in length, and as noble a row of timber as any in the county. Well, there is one tree—the last on the left hand before you

come to the clock house—larger than all the rest—a huge piece of timber, with broad spreading branches, and of I know not what girth in the trunk. Ah! there is something fearful and portentous even in the look of the tree; its leaves have all a darker green than those of any others; its branches are flung out like the arms of a giant; and on wintry nights it will shriek in the tempests like a human being in agony. Some say it was planted in old times by Sir Ranulph, he who built the mansion, and designed the avenue, and whose statue stands before you; and that beneath its roots are scattered the bones of a witch, whom he hunted and worried with his blood-hounds, denying Christian burial to the heathenish remains. This is likely enough; but I have heard other traditions, not so probable; one of which runs, that the tree was originally a stake, which, driven through the body of a murderer, and, nurtured in the soil enriched and fattened with his blood, took root, and, contrary to the course of nature, flourished. This I heed not. One thing, however, is certain, that the tree is, in some mysterious manner, connected with the family of Rookwood, and immediately previous to the death of one of that line, a branch is sure to be shed from the parent stem, prognosticating his doom."

"And such an omen, thou wouldst add, preceded Sir Piers's demise," said Luke.

"Even so. No later than Tuesday morning," replied the sexton, "I happened to be walking down the avenue; I know not what took me thither, but I sauntered leisurely on till I came nigh the tree; and lo! there was a huge bough cumbering the ground, right across my path: an adder would not have startled me so much. There it was, a green, strong branch, broken from the bole—no wind, no storm, no axe, had done it; so I stood still to look upon it. Just then, with a loud, cheering cry, a burst of hounds, and a merry crew of friends at his heels, out galloped Sir Piers from the gate. Full tilt he came towards me; when directly his horse reared at the branch, and out of his saddle he tumbled. He was not hurt by the fall, only startled; but more when he beheld the cause of the accident, than by anything else. He put a bold face on the matter, but I could see it sickened him, and well it might—it was his death-warrant—I could see it in his face, even then. At first he stormed; and asked who had done it. Every body was questioned—all denied a hand in it. Hugh Badger, the keeper, held his horse, but he would not mount, and returned dejectedly to the hall, breaking up the day's sport. Before departing, he addressed a word or two to me in private respecting thee, and pointed, with a melancholy shake of the head, to the branch:

there was a thought of other days in his look. Doctor Titus Tyrconnel tried to cheer him, but it would not do; it was all over, his sand was run. Two days afterwards his doom was accomplished."

"And do you place faith in this idle legend?" asked Luke, with affected indifference, although it was evident, from his manner, that he himself was not so entirely free from a superstitious feeling of belief as he would have it appear.

"Undoubtedly I do," replied the sexton; "I were more difficult to be convinced than the unbelieving disciple else. Thrice hath it occurred to my own knowledge, and ever with the same result; firstly, with Sir Reginald; secondly, with thy own mother; and lastly, as I have just told thee, with Sir. Piers."

"Methought thou saidst, even now, that this death-omen, if such it be, was always confined to the immediate family of Rookwood, and not to mere inmates of the mansion."

"To the heads of that house, be they male or female."

"Then how could it apply to her? Was *she* of that house? Was *she* a wife?"

"Who shall say she was *not*?" replied the sexton.

"Who shall say she *was*?" cried Luke, repeating the words with indignant emphasis—"Who will avouch *that*?"

"Perchance such a one might be found."

"Might! what new perplexity wouldst thou conjure up in a mind perplexed almost beyond endurance? If thou hast aught to say, speak out, and keep me not on the rack of doubt and suspense."

A smile played upon the sexton's countenance: it was cold as wintry sunbeam.

"I will bear this no longer," cried Luke; "anger me not, or look to thyself. In a word, hast thou anything to tell me respecting her? if not, let me begone."

"I have; but I will not be hurried by a boy like thee," replied Peter, doggedly. "Go, if thou wilt, and take the consequences; my lips are shut for ever, and I have much to say—much thou wouldst gladly learn."

"Then out with it; why else came I hither? When you sought me out this morning, in my retreat with the gipsy gang, you bade me meet you in the church porch at midnight; I was true to my appointment."

"And I will keep my promise; sit down. Thou knowest where thou art; 'tis the burial place of the Rookwood family."

"I know it."

"Interrupt me not. What I have got to say concerns you, and your mother likewise, as you will find anon. Look around.

See how each cell within this sepulchre is tenanted. The coffins swarm like chests in a store-house. Ah! how much useful lead is wasted; better melt it down to good balls, and thin superfluous mankind, than keep it to preserve the rotten masses it contains; a few planks are all that is needed for the best of us: give me a deep grave, a thin board, and a gravelly soil. What is a church-yard for—eh?—But no matter, there they are, in all the honour dust can have—fathers and sons—lead enlumber all—lying in tiers of three and four, ay, and as many in places as five. Draw closer, that I may whisper in thine ear. Of every Rookwood that lies around us—and all that ever bore the name, except Sir Piers himself, who lies in state at the hall, are here—not one—mark what I say!—not one male branch of the house but has been suspected—”

“Of what?”

“Murder!” replied the sexton, in a hissing whisper.

“Murder!” echoed Luke, recoiling.

“There is one dark stain—one foul blot on all—blood—blood hath been spilt.”

“By all?”

“Ay, and *such* blood! theirs was no common crime. Even murder hath its degrees—theirs was of the first class.”

“Their wives—you cannot mean that?”

“Ay, their wives!—I do. Thou hast heard it then. Ha! ha! ’tis a trick they had. Didst ever hear the old saying? it’s in every old crone’s lips hereabouts:

‘Never mate brook would,
A Rook of the Rook wood.’

And a merry saying it is, and true; no woman ever stood in a Rookwood’s way, but she was speedily removed, that’s certain. They had all, save poor Sir Piers, the knack of stopping a troublesome woman’s tongue, and practised it to perfection—a rare art, eh?”

“What have the misdeeds of his ancestry,” interposed Luke, “to do with Sir Piers, much less with my mother, unless indeed—”

“Everything. If he could not rid himself of his wife (and she were a match for the devil himself), it follows not that the mistress might be more readily set aside.”

“Hast thou absolute knowledge of aught?” cried Luke, his voice tremulous with anxiety.

“Nay, I but hinted.”

“Such hints are worse than open speech. Let me know the

worst. Did he kill her?" And Luke stared at the sexton as if he would have looked into his secret soul.

But the sexton was not easily fathomed. His cold, bright eye returned Luke's gaze steadfastly, as he answered, composedly—

"I have said all I know."

"But not all thou *thinkest*."

"Thoughts should not always find their utterance in words, else should we often endanger our own safety, and that of others."

"An idle subterfuge; and from thee, worse than idle. I will have an answer, yea or nay. Was it poison—was it steel?"

"Neither."

"But there are other ways by which the vital spark may be extinguished."

"Enough—she died."

"No, not enough—When?—where?"

"In her sleep—in her bed."

"Why, that was natural."

A wrinkling smile crossed the sexton's brow.

"What means that horrible gleam of laughter?" exclaimed Luke, grasping his shoulder with such force as nearly to annihilate the man of graves.

"Speak, or I will strangle thee. Ha! A thought flashes across my brain. She died, you say, in her sleep?"

"In her sleep," replied the sexton, shaking off Luke's hold.

"The evening saw her blithe, healthful, blooming—the morning, stark, stiff, breathless."

"I see," ejaculated Luke, with a frightful gesture. "Was it so?"

"May be."

"And was it to tell me this you brought me hither? Was it to tell me, I had a mother's murder to avenge, that you brought me to the tomb of her destroyer—when he is beyond the reach of my vengeance?"

Luke exhibited so much frantic violence of manner and gesture, that the sexton entertained some little apprehension that his intellects were unsettled, by the shock of the intelligence. It was, therefore, in what he intended for a soothing tone, that he solicited Luke's attention.

"I will hear nothing more," replied Luke, and the vaulted chamber rang with his passionate lamentations. Suddenly pausing, he exclaimed, in a loud voice,—“Dead mother! upon thee I call. If in thy grave, thou canst hear the cry of thy

most wretched son, yearning to avenge thee—answer me, if thou hast the power. Let me have some token of the truth or falsity of these wild suppositions, that I may wrestle against this demon. But no," added he, in accents of despair; "no ear can hear me, save his to whom my wretchedness is food for hellish glee."

"Could the dead hear thee, she might do so. She is not far off," said the sexton.

"Fiend! mock me not."

"Why should I? Thy mother lies within this space."

Luke staggered back, as if struck by a thunderbolt! He spoke not, but fell with a violent shock against a pile of coffins, at which he caught for support.

"Ay, *there*," cried the sexton, extending a skinny finger, "thou hast hit it."

"What have I done?" exclaimed Luke, recoiling.

"What hast thou done? Ha!—have a care!" A thundering crash resounded through the vault. One of the coffins, which Luke had dislodged from its position, tumbled to the ground; it alighted upon its side, splitting asunder in the fall.

"Great heavens! what is this?" cried Luke; as a dead body, clothed in all the hideous apparel of the tomb, rolled forth to his feet.

"It is thy mother's corpse," answered the sexton. "I brought thee hither to behold it; but thou hast anticipated my intentions."

"*This* my mother?" shrieked Luke. "Can the dead indeed hear?" he shudderingly added. "This is a solemn token: she was not insensible to my adjuration."

He dropped upon his knees by the body, seizing one of its chilly hands, and bending over the countenance of the dead, as it lay upon the floor, with its face upwards.

The sexton took the candle from the sconce.

"Art thou sure 'tis she?" demanded Luke, as he approached with the light.

"As sure as that thou livest," was the reply.

"Can this be death?" shouted Luke, half frantic: "Impossible! Oh God! She stirs—she moves. The light!—quick—I see her stir! This is dreadful—intolerable."

"Do not deceive yourself," said the sexton, in a tone which betrayed more emotion than was his wont. "'Tis the bewilderment of fancy: she will never stir again, poor wench." And he shaded the candle with his hand, so as to throw the light full upon the deadly visage. It was motionless as that of

an image carved in stone. Pale was that face as monumental marble; beneath the reflex of the yellow flame it wore a wax-like tint, sicklied to a wanish white. No trace of corruption was visible upon the rigid, yet exquisite tracery of its features. No livid hue deformed the delicacy and beauty of its lineaments, but, lovely as it had been in life, unrivalled for its fairness, so was it in death. The sight was indeed a marvel and a mystery; it was as if some pitying spirit had seized the moment

Before Decay's effacing fingers
Had swept the lines where beauty lingers,

to arrest the hands of the Spoiler, ere one withering touch had been laid upon her brow—ere a breath of his blighting atmosphere had fallen upon his victim, and, failing to avert the stroke of fate, had invested the fine clay it could not re-animate, with a perpetuity of living loveliness. A profuse cloud of raven hair escaped from its swathments in the fall, which hung like a dark veil over the bosom and person of the departed, and presented a startling contrast to the prevailing paleness of the skin and the white sere-clothes. Flesh still adhered to the hand, though it mouldered into dust within the gripe of Luke, as he pressed the fingers to his lips. The garments of the dead were disposed like night-gear about her person, and from without their folds a few withered flowers had fallen. A strong aromatic odour, of a pungent character was diffused around; hence it was evident that the art by which the ancient Egyptians endeavoured to rescue their kindred from decomposition, had been resorted to, to preserve the fleeting charms of the unfortunate Susan Bradley; making it evident, also, that he who, living, loved her not, or loving, had destroyed her, yet when dead—lost to him for ever—had sought, actuated by some inscrutable revulsion of feeling, to save from utter extinction those fatal endowments of person which had first found favour in his eyes, and ultimately ensured the destruction of its hapless possessor.

A pause of awful silence succeeded, broken only by the panting respiration of Luke. He spoke not—groaned not—moved not; but his breast laboured heavily with suppressed emotion, and there was a quivering in the muscles of his limbs, like that proceeding from severe, paralytic affection. The sexton stood by, apparently an indifferent spectator of the scene of horror. He rendered no assistance—pronounced no word of sympathy—expressed no commiseration, but remained fixed for a few mo-

ments in the attitude we have described. His eye wandered from the dead to the living, and gleamed with a peculiar and indefinable expression, half apathy, half abstraction. For one single instant, as he scrutinized the features of his daughter, his brow, contracted as in anger, immediately afterwards was elevated as in scorn; but otherwise you would have sought in vain to read the purport of that cold, insensible glance, which dwelt for one brief space on the face of the mother, and settled eventually upon her son. Worlds would that son have given to have been at that instant equally insensible. A prey to the keenest anguish—to agony almost insupportable, he yet obtained no relief in tears—no drop of moisture found its way to his eyes. The agony of his emotions can only be conceived by those who have endured (and which of us hath altogether escaped?) the martyrdom of moments like to those—who, like him, have felt the iron enter into their soul, and have drained to the dregs the bowl of bitterness.

All those who have similarly suffered, will need no description of the extent of Luke's suffering—of the heart-quake that shook him. Of an earnest vivacity of temperament amounting even to the fierce, he at the same time was endued with the tenderest sensibilities. His case was not like one of those we have enumerated. He had known no mother's love—no mother's watchful care—no mother's gushing tenderness; for him had beamed no mother's well-remembered smile; but the absence of this reality had created in his ardent, enthusiastic mind, possessed from infancy with but one fanciful image, that of his mother—an image—a fantasm, such as haunts a dreamer's brain, of something like the object of his love, such as he dreamed she would have been, had she ever blessed him with her presence; peopling his imagination with a thousand visionary notions of smiles, and tears, and looks, remembered like the indistinct perceptions of childhood, and dwelt upon as fondly; till what had been but a dream, nay, the memory of a dream, assumed, as life advanced, a substance, and a shape, distinct and positive; so that when, for the first time, he actually beheld the object of idolatry before him in death, no wonder that all these hoarded emotions of years should burst forth with irresistible vehemence, and the long sealed fountains of the heart be unloosed.

The sexton, as has been before observed, made no effort to console him. For some space he neither spoke, nor altered his position; at length the withered flowers attracted his attention. He stooped to pick up one of them.

"Faded as the hand that gathered ye, as the bosom on which

ye were strewn!" he murmured. "No sweet smell left—but—faugh." Holding in disgust the dry leaves to the flame of the candle, they were instantly ignited, and the momentary brilliance played like a smile upon the features of the dead. The sexton observed the effect. "Such was thy life," he exclaimed; "a brief, bright sparkle, followed by dark, utter extinction;" and he flung the expiring ashes of the floweret from his hand.

CHAPTER II.

Duch. You are very cold.

I fear you are not well after your travel.

Hah! lights——Oh horrible!

Fer. Let her have lights enough.

Duch. What witchcraft doth he practise, that he hath left

A dead hand here.

DUCHESS OF MALBY.

THE sexton's waning candle now warned him of the progress of time; and having completed his arrangements, he addressed himself to Luke, intimating his intention of departing. Having received no answer, and remarking no signs of life about his grandson, he began to be apprehensive that he had fallen into a swoon. Drawing near to Luke, he took him gently by the arm. Thus disturbed, Luke groaned aloud; but he attempted not to rise.

"Poh—this is worse than Midsummer madness," cried the sexton; "the lad is crazed with grief, and all about a mother who has been four-and-twenty years in her grave. I will even put her out of the way myself."—Saying which, he proceeded, as noiselessly as possible, to raise the corpse in his arms, depositing it softly within its former tenement. Carefully as he executed his task, he could not accomplish it without occasioning a slight accident to the fragile frame. Insensible as he was, Luke had not relinquished the hold he maintained of his mother's hand. And when Peter lifted the body, the ligaments, connecting the hand with the arm, were suddenly snapped asunder. It would appear afterwards, that this joint had been tampered with, and partially dislocated. But without entering

into further particulars in this place, it may be sufficient to observe, that the hand, detached from the socket at the wrist, remained within the gripe of Luke. Ignorant of the mischief he had occasioned, the sexton continued his labours, unconsciously, until the noise which he of necessity made, in stamping with his heel upon the plank, was the means of recalling Luke to sensibility. The first thing he perceived, upon collecting his faculties, were the skeleton fingers, which he found twined within his own. His frame thrilled as he regarded the severed limb.

"What have you done with the body? Why have you left this with me?" said he.

"It was not my intention to have done so," answered the sexton, suspending his occupation. "I have just made fast the lid, but it is easily undone. You had better restore it."

"Restore it," echoed Luke, staring at the bony fragment.

"Ay! of what advantage is a dead hand? 'Tis an unlucky keepsake, and will lead to harm. The only use I ever heard for such a thing, was in the case of bow-legged Ben, he who was hanged in irons for murder, on Hardchase Heath, and whose hand was cut off at the wrist the first night, to make therewith a Hand of Glory, or dead man's candle. Old Mistress Asheton had her throat cut that night, and the candle, held by the glorious fingers, lighted her murderess the while, and subdued the poor woman and her servants into an unawakening sleep—not even a cry was heard. Ho! ho!—But you have no such intentions, I'm sure; if you had this would never serve your turn, for it must be the limb of a hanged malefactor, and the candle must be of the melted fat thereof —"

"Look there," exclaimed Luke, extending the hand towards the sexton. "Seest thou nothing upon that finger?"

"I see something shine. Hold it nigher the light. Ha! that is strange truly. How came it there?"

"How came it there! Ask of Sir Piers! ask of her husband!" shouted Luke, with a wild burst of exulting laughter.

"Ha! ha! 'tis a wedding ring; and look, the finger is bent; it must have been placed thereon in life. There is no deception in this; no trickery—hah!"

"It doth not look like it; that sinew must have been contracted in life. The tendons are pulled down so tightly, that the ring could not be withdrawn without breaking the finger."

"Thou art right; it is so. This is her hand; it must be so. She was his wedded wife. Ha! ha! ha!"

"It would seem so."

"*Seem!* it is undoubted. Thou art sure that coffin contain her body?"

"Thy mother's! Sure as this carcass is my own."

"The hand—'tis her's. Can any doubt exist?"

"Wherefore should it? That hand was broken from the arm by accident within this moment. I noticed not the occurrence, but it must have been so."

"Yes—yes; and she was wedded, and I am not——"

"Illegitimate!—for thy own sake, I am glad of it."

"Glad! my heart will burst. O! could I but establish the fact of this marriage—her fame, my wrongs, would be indeed avenged."

"Be not too sanguine; thou wilt find it no easy task to establish. Granting it were the fact, and I am inclined to think it might be so, consider with whom thou hast to contend."

"Lady Rookwood! Why, *she* was Lady Rookwood before her. She shall know it! she shall know it!"

"Ay, and her son, young Sir Ranulph. Think you he will tamely yield his birthright to you?"

"*His* birthright! *Mine!* if this be so. Sir Ranulph—that title belongs to me. I'll strip them of their borrowed honours. I'll —. Ha! ha!—I shall go mad for joy."

"A word."

"I cannot talk—cannot listen, now."

"Thou art beside thyself. This can never be."

"Never! Give me but a hope—but an inch of ground to stand upon—a thread to cling to, and thou shalt see how I will maintain my hold."

"I give thee no hopes. I can give thee none. Even hadst thou the right, how canst thou, unfriended, poor, make head against those already in possession, and wealthy to boot?"

"I will brave every difficulty, every danger, to assert my claims."

"Grant you will do so; you must have evidence beyond this ring, whereon to found those claims. It may satisfy you, and other credulous people—as myself, for instance—that such a marriage hath taken place; but is scarce likely to meet with implicit belief with others, nor what is more, to obtain for thee the broad lands, and the proud name of Rookwood. And after all, 'tis the union you must establish, beyond a doubt, between Sir Piers and your mother; for it is possible, at least there may be those will say so, that she was a married woman, and yet no wife to Sir Piers."

"They will not repeat the assertion in my hearing. Why say this to me?"

"I do not say so, nor do I think so; all I fear is, that Sir Piers' precautions were so well taken, that you may never be able to adduce proof positive that such a marriage did exist."

"But we may disprove any other alleged alliance, and if Sir Piers did act with so much caution, why left he this speaking evidence, to point, like an index, to the secret?"

"It is not easy to account for it; and yet the chances were against the occurrence of an event like the present. Looking more narrowly at the wrist-joint, it would appear as if he really intended to prevent such a discovery, but had desisted when his work was partially completed, for Sir Piers was ever apt to act one moment, and repent of it the next; and his allowing that ring to remain, most likely proceeded from some passing feeling of remorse; besides, as I said before, he, probably, did not calculate upon such a contingency as this. He took care nobody should see this vault, without his permission, during his lifetime."

Something like a groan followed the conclusion of the sexton's discourse. It was evident that it proceeded not from Luke, as an exclamation burst from him at the same instant. Luke stretched out his arm, an unsubstantial something seemed to press against him, communicating a chill like death to his frame.

"Who is between us?" he ejaculated.

"Is aught between us?" inquired the sexton, leaping from the coffin lid with an agility that did him honour.

"I will discharge my gun. The flash will light us," exclaimed Luke.

"Do so," hastily rejoined the Sexton; "but not in this direction."

"Get behind me," cried Luke, and he pulled the trigger.

A blaze of vivid light illumined the darkness. Still nothing was visible, save the warrior figure, which showed suddenly, and then vanished like a ghost. The buck-shot rattled against the farther end of the vault.

"Let us hence," cried the sexton, who had rushed to the door, and thrown it wide open. "Mole! Mole!" The dog sprang after him.

"I could have sworn that I felt something," said Luke; "whence issued that groan?"

"Ask not whence," replied Peter. "Reach me my mattock, and spade, and the lantern; they are behind thee. And stay, it were better to bring away the bottle."

"Take them and leave me here."

"Here, in the vault? I could tell you a story of that state—~~that~~—"

"Not now."

"You will rue it—there is danger—the arch fiend himself ~~is~~ not more terrible—"

"Leave me I say; or await, if thou wilt, my coming, in ~~the~~ church. If there is aught that may be revealed to my ear alone, I will not quail from it, though the dead themselves should arise to proclaim the mystery. It may be—but—go—there ~~are~~ thy tools;" and he shut the door, with a jar that shook the ~~sex-~~ton's frame.

Peter, after some muttered murmurings at the hardihood and madness, as he termed it, of his headstrong grandson, disposed his lengthy limbs to repose, upon a cushioned seat without the communion railing. As the pale moonlight fell upon his gaunt visage, he looked like some unholy thing, suddenly annihilated by the presiding influence of that sacred spot. Mole coiled himself in a ring at his master's feet. Peter had not dosed many minutes, when he was aroused by Luke's return. The latter was very pale, and the perspiration stood in big drops upon his brow.

"Hast thou made fast the door?" was his first interrogation.

"Here is the key."

"What hast thou seen?" he next inquired, remarking the deathly paleness of his face.

Luke made no answer. At that moment the church clock struck two, breaking the stillness of the place with an iron clang. Luke raised his eyes. A ray of moonlight, streaming obliquely through the painted window, fell upon the gilt lettering of a black mural entablature. The lower part, the inscription, was in shade, but the emblazonment, and

Reginaldus de Bockwood, Eques Auratus.

were clear and distinct. Luke trembled, he knew not why, as the sexton pointed to it.

"Thou hast heard of the hand-writing upon the wall," said the Sexton; "Look there—*His* kingdom hath been taken from him."—Ha, ha!"

"Let us quit this place, and get into the fresh air; I am faint," said Luke, striding past his companion, and traversing the church-floor with hasty steps. Peter was not slow to follow. The key was applied, and they emerged into the church-yard. The grassy mounds were bathed in the moon-beams, and the two yew trees, throwing their black jagged shadows over

the grave hills looked like evil spirits, brooding over the sanctified repose of the righteous.

The sexton noticed the deathly paleness of Luke's countenance; but it might be the tinge of the sallow moonlight that gave it that livid tint.

"I will be with thee at thy cottage, ere day-break," said the latter; and turning an angle of the church, he disappeared from view.

"He is crazed, beyond all question," said Peter shouldering his spade, and whistling to Mole; "though it must be confessed, his brain must have been strong, to have withstood the trial of this night. Mischief, I foresee, will come of it; but I shall not trouble my head with these matters, at least for the present. Should it be needful, he shall know more; meanwhile, a dram and a song will put care to flight." Draining the bottle to the last drop, he flung it from him, and commenced chanting a wild ditty, the words of which ran as follow:—

THE SEXTON'S SONG.

The Carrion Crow is a Sexton bold,
He raketh the dead from out the mould;
He delveth the ground like a miser old,
Stealthily hiding his store of gold.
Caw! Caw!

The Carrion Crow hath a coat of black,
Silky and sleek, like a priest's, to his back;
Like a lawyer he grubbeth—no matter what way—
The fouler the offal, the richer his prey.
Caw! Caw! the Carrion Crow!
Dig! Dig! in the ground below!

The Carrion Crow hath a dainty maw,
With savoury pickings he crammeth his craw;
Kept meat from the gibbet it pleaseth his whim,
It never can hang too long for him.
Caw! Caw!

The Carrion Crow smelleth powder, 'tis said,
Like a soldier escheweth the taste of cold lead;
No jester or mime hath more marvellous wit,
For wherever he lighteth he maketh a hit.
Caw! Caw! the carrion crow!
Dig! Dig! in the ground below!

The cottage which Peter inhabited adjoined the church-yard, so that he had scarcely concluded his song when he reached the door; and as soon as he had disposed of his tools, he betook himself to slumber.

CHAPTER III.

Brian. Ralph! hearest thou any stirring?

Ralph. I heard one speak here, hard by, in ~~the~~ hollow. Pshaw! Master, speak low. Nouns! if I do not hear a bow go off, and the buck bray, I never heard deer in my life.

Bri. Stand, or I'll shoot.

Sir Arthur. Who's there?

Bri. I am the keeper, and do charge you stand.

You have stolen my deer.

MERRA DEVEL OF EDMONTON.

LUKE's first impulse had been to free himself from the restraint the sexton's society imposed. He longed to commune with himself. Leaping the small boundary-wall that defended the church-yard from a deep, green lane, he hurried along in a direction contrary to that taken by the sexton, making the best of his way until he arrived at a gap in the high-banked hazel hedge, which overhung the road. Heedless of the impediments thrown in his way by the undergrowth of a rough, ring fence, he struck through the opening that presented itself, and, climbing over the moss-grown paling, trod presently upon the elastic sward of Rookwood Park.

A few minutes rapid walking brought him to the summit of a rising ground crowned with aged oaks, and as he paused beneath their broad shadows, his troubled spirit, soothed by the quietude of the scene, in part resumed its serenity.

Luke yielded to the gentle influence of the time and hour. The stillness of the spot sobered the irritation of his frame, and the dewy chillness cooled the fever of his brow. Leaning for support against the gnarled trunk of one of the trees, he surrendered himself to contemplation. The events of the last hour—of his whole existence—passed in rapid review before his mental vision. The thought of the wayward, vagabond life he had led—of the wild adventures of his youth—of all he had been—of all he had done—of all he had endured—crowded

his mind; and then, like the passing of a cloud flitting across the autumnal moon, and occasionally obscuring the smiling landscape before him, his soul was shadowed by the remembrance of the awful revelations of the last hour, and the fearful knowledge he had acquired of his mother's fate—of his father's guilt. Shudderingly he called to mind the horrors he had witnessed, but the occultation was of brief endurance; the cloud passed away, the moon was full again in all her ancient lustre—the future—the bright glorious future, was before him, and he eagerly longed for the coming struggle, the result of which, his sanguine anticipations pictured as guerdoned with success.

The eminence on which Luke stood was one of the highest points of the park, and commanded a view of the hall, which might be a quarter of a mile distant, discernible through a broken vista of trees, its whitened walls shimmering in the moon-light, and its tall chimneys spiring far from out the round masses of wood wherein it lay embosomed. The ground gradually sloped in that direction, occasionally rising into swells, studded with magnificent timber—dipping into smooth dells, or stretching out into level glades, until it suddenly sunk into a deep declivity, that formed an effectual division, without the intervention of a ha-ha, or other barrier, between the Chase and the Home Park. A slender stream strayed through this ravine, having found its way thither from a small reservoir, hidden in the higher plantations to the left; and further on, in the open ground, in a line with the hall, though, of course, much below the level of the building, assisted by many local springs, and restrained by a variety of natural and artificial embankments, this brook spread out into an expansive sheet of water. Crossed by a rustic bridge, the sole mean of communication between the parks, the pool found its outlet into the meads below; and even at that distance, and in that still hour, you might almost catch the sound of the rushing waters, as they dashed down the elevation in a foaming cascade; while far away, in the spreading valley, the serpentine meanderings of the slender current might be traced, glittering like silvery threads in the lambent moonshine. The mild beams of the queer of night, then in her meridian, trembled upon the topmost branches of the tall timber, quivering, like diamond spray upon the outer foliage, and penetrating through the interstices of the trees, fell upon the light wreaths of vapour then beginning to rise from the surface of the pool, steeping them in misty splendour, and lending to this part of the picture a character of dreamy and unearthly beauty.

All else was in unison—no sound interrupted the silence of Luke's solitude, except the hooting of a large grey owl, who was either scared at his approach, or in search of prey, winged its swift flight in continuous and mazy circles round his head, uttering at each wheel its startling whoop; or a deep, distant bellow ever and anon boomed upon the ear, proceeding from a pool of water bounds kennelled in a shed adjoining the pool before mentioned, but which was shrouded from view by the rising ground. No living objects presented themselves, save a herd of deer that crouched in a covert of brown fern beneath the umbrage of a few stunted trees immediately below the point on which whereon Luke stood; and although their branching antlers could scarcely be detected from the shadowy ramifications of the wood itself, they escaped not his practised ken.

"How often," murmured Luke, "in years gone by, I have traversed these moonlit glades, and wandered amidst these lonely lands, on nights heavenly as this—ay, and to some purpose, yon thinned herd might testify! Every dingle, every every rising brow, every bosky vale and shelving covert has been as familiar to my track as to that of the fleetest and swiftest of their number: scarce a tree amidst the thickest of yon stretching forest, with which I cannot claim acquaintance long since I have seen them.—By heavens! 'tis beautiful and it is all my own—my own!"

"Can I forget that it was here I first emancipated myself from thralldom? Can I forget the boundless feeling of freedom that danced within my veins when I first threw off the yoke of servitude, and roved unshackled, unrestrained, amidst the woods?—The wild intoxicating bliss still tingles to my ears. And they are all my own—my own! Softly, what has been there?"

Luke's attention was arrested by an object which could hardly fail to interest him, sportsman as he was: a snorting bellow was heard, and a lordly stag stalked slowly and majestically out of the copse. Luke watched the actions of the noble creature with great interest, drawing back into the shade; a hundred yards or thereabouts might be between him and the bull, but he was within range of ball—Luke mechanically grasped his bow, yet his hand had scarcely raised the piece half way to his shoulder, when he dropped it again to its rest.

"What am I about to do?" he exclaimed. "Why, for my pastime, should I take away yon noble creature's life, his carcass would be utterly useless to me? Yet such is the force of habit, that I can scarce resist the impulse that tempts me."

me to fire; and I have known the time, and that not long since, when I should scarce have shown so much self-control."

Unconscious of the danger it had escaped the animal moved forward with the same stately step; suddenly it stopped, with ears pricked, as if some sound had smote them. At that instant the click of a gun-lock was heard, at a little distance to the right of Luke—it had missed fire; an instantaneous report from another gun succeeded—and, with a bound high in air, the buck fell upon his back, struggling in the agonies of death. Luke had at once divined the cause; he was aware that poachers were at hand. He fancied that he knew the parties; nor was he deceived in his conjecture. Two figures issued instantly from a covert on the right, and making to the spot, the first who reached it, put an end to the animal's struggles by plunging a knife into its throat. The affrighted herd took to their heels, and were seen darting swiftly down the Chase. Luke, meantime, had recognized the voices of the men, and considered within himself whether he should make known his vicinity to them or not. He felt half inclined to resent the deed of slaughter he had witnessed, as an insult to himself, and to treat his companions, for such they were, as aggressors of his own imaginary rights. At first, he resolved to rush upon them, and compel a relinquishment of their prey: but a moment's reflection convinced him of the futility, as well as risk of such a proceeding, and resolving to abide their departure where he was, he kept a watchful eye upon their movements.

Compressing one knee forcibly on the still throbbing heart of his victim, with the reeking knife between his teeth, one of the twain was occupied in feeling for the deer's fat, when he was approached by the other, who pointed in the direction of the house. The former raised himself from his kneeling posture, and both appeared to listen attentively. Luke fancied he heard a slight sound in the distance; whatever the noise proceeded from, it was evident the deer stealers were alarmed—they laid hold of the buck, and, dragging it along, concealed the carcass amongst the tall fern; they then retreated, halting for an instant to deliberate, within a few yards of Luke, who was concealed from their view by the trunk of the tree, behind which he had ensconced his person. They were so near that he lost not a word of their muttered conference.

"The game's spoiled, this time, Rob Rust, any how," growled one, in an angry tone; "the hawks are upon us, and we must mizzle, and leave the fallen bird to take care of itself. Curse him; who'd a'thought of Hugh Badger's putting his queer gamms in motion to-night? Curse him, though the tatler

be up, and blinking like a glim, I did think he'd have kept quiet house to-night, if only for decency's sake; but there's no thought of the old squire's finny* running in his addled head."

"I see 'em," returned the other, "thanks to old Oliver—there they are—two—three—and a muzzled bouser,† too. There's Hugh at the head of 'em—shall we stand, and show fight?—I have half a mind for it."

"No, no," replied the first speaker, "that will never do, Rob—why run the risk of being grab'd for a bit of venison? Had Luke Bradley been with us, indeed, it might have been another guess business; but he's with that old resurrection cove, his grand-dad, in the church—I saw 'em going there myself. Besides we've that to do at the hall, that may make men of us for the rest of our nat'ral lives. It won't do to be grabbed in the nick of it—so let's be off, and make for our prancers, in the lane—keep in the munge‡ as much as you can." And away they scampered down the hill-side.

"Shall I follow," thought Luke, "and run the risk of falling into the keeper's hand, just at this crisis, too? No—but if I am found here, I shall be taken for one of the gang. Something must be done—ha! devil take them, here they are, already."

Further time was not allowed him for reflection—a hoarse baying was heard, followed by a loud cry from the keepers. The dog had scented out the game: and, as secrecy was no longer necessary, his muzzle had been removed. To rush forth now were certain betrayal; to remain was almost equally certain detection; and, doubting whether he should obtain credence from the keepers, if he delivered himself over in that garb, and armed, he at once rejected the idea. Just then it flashed across his recollection that his gun had remained unloaded, and he applied himself eagerly to repair this negligence, when he heard the dog in full cry, making swiftly in his direction. He threw himself upon the ground, where the fern was thickest; but this seemed insufficient to baffle the sagacity of the hound—he had got his scent, and was baying close at hand. The keepers were drawing nigh—Luke gave himself up for lost. The dog, however, stopped where the two poachers had halted, and was there completely at fault: snuffing the ground, he bayed, wheeled round, and then set off, with renewed barking, upon their track. Hugh Badger and his com-

* Funeral.

† Dog.

‡ Darkness.

rades loitered an instant at the same place, looked warily round, and then, as Luke conjectured, followed in the hound's track.

Swift as thought, Luke leapt on his feet, and without even pausing to ascertain which route the keepers had taken, started at full speed, shaping his course in a cross line for the lane, and keeping as much as possible under cover of the trees. Rapid as was his flight, it was not without a witness: one of the keeper's assistants, who had lagged behind, gave the view-holloa in a loud voice. Luke pressed forward with redoubled energy, endeavouring to gain the shelter of the plantation, and this he could readily have accomplished, had no impediment been in his way; but his rage and vexation were boundless, when he heard the keeper's cry echoed by shouts immediately below him, and the tongue of the hound resounding in the hollow. He turned sharp round, steering a middle course, and still aiming at the fence. It was evident, from the cheers of his pursuers, that he was in full view, and he heard them encouraging and directing the hound.

Luke had gained the park pailings, along which he rushed, in the vain quest of some practicable point of egress, for the fence was higher in this part of the park than in the other parts, owing to the inequality of the ground. He had cast away his gun as useless; but even without that incumbrance, he dared not hazard the delay of climbing the pailings. At this juncture a deep breathing was heard close behind him—he threw a glance over his shoulder—within a few yards was a ferocious bloodhound, with whose savage nature Luke was well acquainted; the breed, some of which he had already seen, having been maintained at the hall ever since the days of Sir Ranulph. The eyes of the hound were glaring, blood-red—his tongue hanging out, and a row of keen white fangs displayed, like the teeth of a shark. There was a growl—a leap—and the hound was close upon him.

Luke's courage was undoubted; but his heart failed him as he heard the bark of the remorseless brute, and felt that he could not avoid an encounter with him. His resolution was instantly taken: he stopped short, with such suddenness, that the dog, then in the act of springing, flew past him with great violence, and the time, momentary as it was, occupied by the animal in recovering itself, enabled Luke to drop on his knee, and to place one arm, like a buckler, before his face, while he held the other in readiness to grapple his adversary. Uttering a fierce yell, the hound returned to the charge, darting at Luke, who received the assault without flinching; and in spite of a severe laceration of the arm, he seized the animal by the throat,

and hurling it upon the ground, jumped with all his fire into its stomach. A yell of agony, and the contest was over. Luke at liberty to pursue his flight unmolested.

Brief as had been the interval required for this combat, it had been sufficient to bring the pursuers within sight of the Hugh Badger, who from the uplands had witnessed of his favourite, with a loud oath discharged the contents of his gun at the head of its destroyer. Fortunate was it for Luke that at that instant he stumbled over the root of a tree, which rattled in the leaves as he fell, and the keeper, concluding he had at least winged his game, descended more leisurely towards him. As he lay upon the ground, Luke felt that he was wounded; whether by the bite of the dog, from a scratch, or from bruises inflicted by the fall, he could not determine, but, smarting with pain, he resolved to wreak his vengeance upon the first person who approached him. He vowed that he would be taken with life—to strangle any who should lay hands on him. At that moment he felt a pressure at his breast, and the dead hand of his mother.

Luke shuddered. His wrath was curbed—the fire of his passion quenched. He mentally cancelled his rash oath; yet he would not bring himself to surrender at discretion, and without effort. The keeper and his assistants were approaching the spot where he lay, and searching for his body—Hugh was foremost, and within a yard of him. "Curse him, Hugh, the rascal's not half killed, he seems to be still alive." The words were scarcely out of his mouth ere he was dashed backwards, and lay sprawling upon the sod. and unexpectedly, as an Indian chief might rush upon a foe, arose Luke, propelling himself with tremendous force against Hugh, who happened to stand in his way, and the startled assistants, who were either too much taken by surprise, or unwilling to draw a trigger, could in any case do nothing to aid him, exerting all the remarkable activity they possessed, he caught hold of a projecting branch of a tree, swung himself, at a single bound, fairly over the palisade.

Stout Hugh Badger was shortly on his legs, and, lustily at his defeat. Directing his men to skirt along the fence, and make for a particular part of the plantation named, and snatching a loaded fowling-piece from one of them, he clambered over the pales, and guided by the branches, and other sounds conveyed to his quick ears, he sped rapidly upon Luke's track.

The plantation through which the chase was now passing was not, as might be supposed, a continuation of the

which Luke had originally crossed, on his entrance into the park, though guided by the same line of paling, but, in reality, a close pheasant preserve, occupying the banks of a ravine, which, after a deep and tortuous course, terminated in the dellivity heretofore described as forming the park boundary. Luke plunged into the heart of this defile, fighting his way downwards, in the direction of the brook. His progress was impeded by a thick undergrowth of briar, and other matted vegetation, as well as by the entanglements thrown in his way by the taller bushes of thorn, and hazel, the entwined and elastic branches of which, in their recoil, galled and fretted him, by inflicting frequent smart blows on his face and hands. This was a hardship he usually little regarded; but, upon the present occasion, it had the effect, by irritating his temper, of increasing the thirst of vengeance raging in his bosom.

Through the depths of the ravine welled the shallow stream before alluded to, and Hugh Badger had no sooner reached its sedgey margin than he lost all trace of the fugitive. He looked cautiously round, listened intently, and inclined his ear to catch the faintest echo; but all was still, not a branch shook, not a leaf rustled. Hugh was aghast. He had made sure of getting a glimpse, and, perhaps, a stray shot, at the "poaching rascal," as he termed him, "in the open space, which he was sure the fellow was aiming to reach; and now, all at once, he had disappeared, like a will-o'-the-wisp or a boggart of the clough." However, he could not be far off, and he endeavoured to obtain some clew to guide him in his quest. He was not long in detecting recent marks deeply indented in the mud on the opposite bank. Hugh leapt hither incontinently. Farther on, some rushes were trodden down, and there were other indications of the course the fugitive had taken.

"Hark forward!" shouted Hugh, in the joy of his heart, at this discovery; and, like a well-trained dog, he followed up, with prompt alacrity, the scent he had opened. The brook presented still fewer impediments to expedition than the thick copse, and the keeper pursued the gyrations of the petty current, occasionally splashing into the stream. Here and there was an appearance on the sod that satisfied him that he was in the right way. At length he became aware, from the crumbling soil, that the object of his pursuit had scaled the bank, and he forthwith moderated his career. Halting, he perceived what he took to be a face peeping at him from behind a knot of alders that overhung, half way up the steep and shelving bank immediately above him. His gun was instantly at his shoulder.

"Come down, you infernal deer-stealing scoundrel," cried Hugh, "or I'll blow you to shivers."

No answer was returned: expostulation was vain; and fearful of placing himself at a disadvantage if he attempted to scale the bank, Hugh fired without further parley. The sharp discharge rolled in echoes down the ravine, and a pheasant, scared at the sound, answered the challenge from a neighbouring tree. Hugh was an unerring marksman, and on this occasion his aim had been steadily taken. The result was not precisely such as he had anticipated. A fur cap, shaken by the shot from the bough whereon it hung, came rolling down the bank, proclaiming the *ruse* that had been practised upon the keeper. Little time was allowed him for reflection; before he could reload, he felt himself collared by the iron arm of Luke.

The keeper was a man of great personal strength—square-set, bandy-legged, with a prodigious width of chest, and vast volume of muscular power; and energetic as was Luke's assault, he maintained his ground without flinching. The struggle was desperate. Luke was of slighter proportion, though exceeding the keeper, in stature, by the head and shoulders. This superiority availed him little; it was rather a disadvantage in the conflict that ensued. The gripe he fastened upon Hugh's throat was like that of a clenched vice; but he might as well have compressed the neck of a bull, as that of the stalwart keeper. Defending himself with his hobnail boots, with which he inflicted several severe blows on Luke's shins, and struggling vehemently, Hugh succeeded in extricating himself from his throttling grasp; he then closed with his foe, and they were locked together like intertwining snakes. In the manner of bears at play, they hugged each other, straining and tugging, and practising every sleight and stratagem coming within the scope of feet, knees, and thighs—now tripping, now jerking; now advancing, now retreating; but all with doubtful result. Victory, at length, seemed to declare itself in favour of the sturdy keeper. Aware of his opponent's strength, it was Luke's chief endeavour to keep his lower limbs disengaged, and to trust more to skill than to force for ultimate success. To prevent this was the keeper's object: he guarded himself against every feint, and ultimately succeeded in firmly grappling his agile assailant. Luke's spine was almost cracked in twain by the shock, when suddenly he gave way, and, without losing his balance, drew his adversary forward, at the same instant kicking the keeper's right leg from under him, and dashing him backwards. With a crash like that of an uprooted oak, Hugh tumbled, with his foe upon him, into the bed of the rivulet.

Not a word had been spoken during the conflict. A convulsive groan burst from Hugh's hardy breast, enforced by the weighty body above him. His hand sought his girdle, but in vain; his knife was gone. Gazing upwards, his dancing vision encountered the glimmer of the blade—the knife had dropped from its case in the fall—Luke brandished it before his eyes.

"Villain!" gasped Hugh, ineffectually struggling to free himself, "you will not murder me?" And his efforts were desperate.

"No," answered Luke, flinging the uplifted weapon into the brook; "I will not do that, though thou hast twice aimed at my life to-night; but I will silence thee, at all events—." And with that he dealt the keeper a blow on the head that terminated all further resistance on his part. Leaving the inert mass to choke up the current, with whose waters the blood, oozing from the wound, began to commingle, Luke prepared to depart.

His perils were not yet past. Guided by the firing, the report of which alarmed them, the keeper's assistants hastened in the direction whence they imagined the sound proceeded, presenting themselves directly in the path Luke was about to take. He had either to retrace his steps, or face a double enemy. His election was made at once. He turned and fled.

For an instant the men tarried with their bleeding companion—they dragged him from the brook—then, with loud oaths, followed in hot pursuit.

Threading for a second time the bosky labyrinth, Luke sought the source of the stream. This was precisely the course his enemies would have selected for him; and when they beheld him take it, they felt confident of his capture. On—on—they sped.

The sides of the hollow became more and more abrupt as they advanced, though less covered with brushwood. The fugitive made no attempt to climb the bank, but still prest forward. The road was tortuous, and wound round a jutting point of rock. Now he was a fair mark—no, he had swept swiftly by, and was out of sight, before a gun could be raised. They reached the same point—he was still before them—but his race was nearly run. Steep slippery rocks, shelving down to the edges of a small but deep pool of water, the source of the stream, formed an apparently insurmountable barrier in that direction. Rooted (heaven knows how!) in some rift or fissure of the rock, grew a wild ash, throwing out a few boughs over the solitary pool; this is all the support Luke can hope for, should he attempt to scale the rock. The rock was sheer—the pool was deep—yet still he hurried on. He reached the muddy

embankment—he mounted its sides—he seemed to hesitate. The keepers were now within a hundred yards—both guns were discharged—and sudden as the reports, with a dead, splashless plunge, like a diving otter, the fugitive dropped into the water.

The pursuers were at the brink. They gazed at the pool. A few bubbles floated upon its surface, and burst. The water was slightly discoloured with sand. No ruddier stain crimsoned the tide—no figure rested on the naked rock—no hand clung to the motionless tree.

“Devil take the rascal,” growled one; “I hope he hasn’t escaped us, after all.”

“No—no, he’s fast enough, never fear,” rejoined the other; “sticking like an eel at the bottom o’ the pond; and damn him he deserves it, for he’s slipp’d out of our fingers eelfashion, often enough, to-night. But come, we’ll drag for the body in the morning. Let’s be moving, and give poor Hugh Badger a helping hand. A pretty business he have made of it, to be sure. Come along.”

Whereupon they returned to the assistance of the wounded and discomfited keeper.

CHAPTER IV.

I am right against my House—Seat of my Ancestors!

YORKSHIRE TRAGEDY.

WE shall now conduct our readers to the seat of the family, so frequently alluded to in the preceding chapters.

Rookwood Place, was a fine, old, irregular pile, of considerable size, presenting a rich, picturesque outline, with its innumerable gable ends, fantastical coigns, and tall crest of twisted chimneys. There was no uniformity of style about the building, yet the general effect was pleasing and beautiful; its very irregularity constituted its chief charm. Nothing but convenience had been consulted in its construction; additions had from time to time been made to it, but everything had dropped into its proper place, and, without apparent effort or design, had grown into an ornament, heightening the beauty of the whole. It was, in short, one of those glorious manorial houses,

that, like realized visions of Eld, sometimes unexpectedly greet us in our wanderings, and gladden us as to the discovery of a hidden treasure. Some such ancestral hall (though not precisely of the same character) have we accidentally encountered in unlooked-for quarters in our native county of Lancaster, or in its smiling sister shire, and never without feelings of intense delight, rejoicing to behold the freshness of its antiquity, and the greenness of its old age; for be it observed, in passing, that a Cheshire, or Lancashire Hall, time-honoured though it be, with its often-renovated black-and-white squares, fancifully filled up with trefoils and quatrefoils, rosettes, and other figures, seems to bear its years so lightly, that its age, so far from detracting from its beauty, only lends it a grace; and the same mansion, to all outward appearance, fresh and perfect as it existed in the days of Elizabeth, may be seen in admirable preservation in the days of William our Liege.

The mansion was originally built by Sir Ranulph de Rokewood, the first of the name, a stout Yorkist, who flourished in the reign of Edward the Fourth, and received the fair domain and broad lands upon which the edifice was raised, at the hands of his sovereign, in reward for good service, retiring thither in the decline of life, at the close of the wars of the Roses, to sequestrate himself from scenes of strife, and to consult his spiritual weal in the erection and endowment of the neighbouring church. It was of mixed architecture, and combined many of the peculiarities of each era. Retaining some of the sterner features of earlier days, the period ere yet the embattled manor-house peculiar to the reigns of the later Henries had been merged in the graceful and peaceable Hall, the residence of the Rokewoods had early anticipated the gentler characteristics of a later day, though it could boast little of that exuberance of external ornament, that luxuriance of design, and prodigality of beauty, which, under the sway of the Virgin Queen, distinguished the residence of the wealthier English landowner, and rendered the Hall of Elizabeth, properly so called, the pride and boast of our Domestic Architecture.

The site which Sir Ranulph had selected for his habitation, had been already occupied by a vast fabric of oak, which he in part removed, though some vestiges might still be traced of that ancient structure. A massive pile succeeded, with gate and tower, court and moat complete, stable enough, one would have thought, to have endured for centuries; but even this substantial change grew into disuse, and Sir Ranulph's successors, remodelling, repairing, almost rebuilding the whole mansion, in the end so metamorphosed its aspect, that at last

little of its original and distinctive character remained. Still, as we said before, it was a fine, old house, though some changes had taken place for the worse, which could not be readily pardoned by the eye of taste: as, for instance, the deep embayed windows, had sunk into modernized casements, of lighter construction; the wide porch, with its flight of steps leading to the great hall of entrance, had yielded to a narrow door; and the broad, quadrangular court was occupied by a gravel drive. Yet, despite of all these mutations, the house of the Rookwoods, for an old house (and, after all, what is like a good, old house!) was no undesirable, or uncongenial abode for any worshipful country gentleman "that hath a great estate."

The Hall was situated near the base of a gently declining hill, terminating a noble avenue of limes, and partially embosomed in an immemorial wood of that same timber, which had given its name to the family that dwelt among its rook-peopled shades. Descending the avenue at the point of access afforded by a road that wound down the hill-side, towards a village distant about half a mile, as you advanced, the eye was first arrested by a singular octagonal turret of brick, of more recent origin than the house, though in all probability occupying the place where the bartizan'd gateway stood of yore. This tower rose to a height corresponding with the roof of the mansion, and was embellished on the side facing the house, with a flamingly gilt time-piece, peering, like an impudent observer, at all that passed within doors; two apartments, which it contained, were appropriated to the house-porter. Despoiled of its martial honours, the gateway still displayed the achievements of the family, carved in granite, which had resisted the storms of two centuries, though stained green with moss, and mapped over with lichens. To the left, overgrown with ivy, and peeping from out a tuft of trees, appeared the summit of the dovecot, indicating the near neighbourhood of an ancient barn, contemporary with the earliest dwelling-house, and of a little world of offices and out-buildings, that lay buried in the thickness of the foliage. To the right was the garden—the pleasure of the place—formal, precise, old fashioned, artificial, yet exquisite!—(for commend us to the by-gone, beautiful, English garden—*really a garden*—not that mixture of park, meadow, and wilderness,* brought up to one's very windows

* Payne Knight, the scourge of Repton and his school, speaking of the licence indulged in by the modern landscape gardeners, thus vents his indignation:

-which, since the days of the innovators, Kent, and his "bold associates," Capability Brown and Co., has attained so largely) —this *was* a garden! There might have been seen the stately terraces, such as Watteau, and our own Wilson, in his earlier works, painted—the trim alleys, exhibiting all the triumphs of Topiarian art—

The sidelong walls,
Of shaven yew; the holly's prickly arms,
Trimm'd into high arcades; the tonsile box,
Wove in mosaic mode of many a curl,
Around the figured carpet of the lawn.*

the gayest of parterres and greenest of lawns, with its admonitory sun-dial, its marble basin in the centre, its fountain and conched water-god—the quaint summer-house, surmounted with the gilt vane—the statue, glimmering from out its covert of leaves—the cool cascade—the urns—the bowers—and a hundred luxuries beside, suggested and contrived by Art to render Nature most enjoyable, and to enhance the recreative delights of home-out-of-doors (for such a garden should be), with least sacrifice of in-door comfort and convenience.

When Epicurus to the world had taught,
That pleasure was the chiefest good;
(And was perhaps i' th' right, if rightly understood)
His life he to his doctrines brought—
And in his garden's shade that sovereign pleasure sought.†

All these delights might once have been enjoyed; but at the time of which we write, this fair garden was for the most

"But here, once more, ye rural muses weep
The ivy'd balustrade, and terrace steep—
Walls—mellowed into harmony by time
On which fantastic creepers used to climb
While statues, labyrinths, and alleys pent,
Within their bounds, at least were innocent!
Our modern taste, alas! no limit knows;
O'er hill, o'er dale, through wood and field it flows;
Spreading o'er all its unprolific spawn,
In never-ending sheets of vapid lawn."

The Landscape, a didactic Poem, addressed
to Uvedale Price, Esq.

* Mason's English Garden.

† Cowley.

part a waste. Ill kept, neglected, unregarded, the gay parterres were disfigured with weeds—grass grew on the gravel walk—several of the urns were overthrown—the hour upon the dial was untold—the fountain choked up, and the smooth shaven lawn only rescued, it would seem, from the general fate, that it might answer the purpose of a bowling green, as the implements of that game, scattered about, plainly testified.

Diverging from the garden to the house, we have before remarked that the more ancient characteristic features of the place had been for the most part obliterated and destroyed, less by the hand of time than to suit the tastes of different proprietors; this, however, was not so observable in the eastern wing, which overlooked the garden. Here might be discerned many indications of its antiquity. The strength and solidity of the walls, which had not been, as elsewhere, masked with brick work—the low Tudor arches—the mullioned bars of the windows—all attested its age. Within, this wing was occupied by an upper and lower gallery, communicating with suites of chambers, for the most part deserted, excepting one or two, which were used as dormitories, and another little room on the ground-floor, with an oriel window opening upon the lawn, and commanding the prospect beyond—a favourite resort for the matutine refecton of the late Sir Piers; the interior was curious for its ceiling, moulded in plaster, with the arms and alliances of the Rookwoods. In the centre was the royal blazon of Elizabeth, who had once honoured the hall with a visit during a progress.

To return, for a moment, to the garden, which we linger about as a bee round a flower:—below the lawn there was another terrace, edged by a low balustrade of stone, which commanded a lovely view of park, water, and woodland—high hanging woods in the foreground, and an extensive sweep of flat champaign country, stretching out to meet a line of blue, hazy hills that bounded the distant horizon.

From the house to its inhabitants, the transition is natural. Besides the connection between them, there were many points of resemblance—many family features in common—the same original grandeur, the same character of romance, the same fanciful display. Nor were the secret passages, peculiar to the one, wanting to the history of the other: both had their mysteries. One blot there was in the otherwise proud escutcheon of the Rookwoods, that dimmed its splendour, and made pale its pretensions: their sun was eclipsed in blood from its rising to its meridian; and so it seemed would be its setting. This foul reproach attached to all the race;

—none escaped it. Traditional rumours were handed down from father to son, throughout the county, and, like all other rumours, had taken to themselves wings, and flown abroad: their crimes became a by-word. How was it they escaped punishment? How came they to evade the hand of justice? Proof was ever wanting—justice ever baffled. They were a stern and stiff-necked people, of indomitable pride and unconquerable resolution, with, for the most part, force of character sufficient to enable them to breast difficulties and dangers that would have overwhelmed ordinary individuals. No quality is so advantageous to its possessor as firmness—every obstacle will yield to it, and the determined energy of the Rookwoods bore them harmless through a sea of troubles; besides, they had taken their measures properly. They were wealthy; lavish even to profusion—and gold will do much if skilfully administered; yet, despite of all this, a dark, ominous cloud settled over their house, and men wondered when the vengeance of Heaven, so long delayed, would fall and consume it.

Possessed of considerable landed property, once extending over nearly half a county, the family increased in power and importance for an uninterrupted series of years, until the outbreak of that intestine discord which ended in the Civil Wars, when the espousal of the royalist party, with sword and substance, by Sir Ralph Rookwood, the then lord of the mansion (a dissolute, depraved personage, who, however, had been made a Knight of the Bath at the coronation of Charles I.) ended in his own destruction at Naseby, and the wreck of much of his property; a loss, which the gratitude of Charles II., on his restoration, did not fail to make good to Sir Ralph's youthful heir.

Sir Ralph Rookwood left two sons, Reginald and Alan. The fate of the latter, and the younger, was buried in obscurity. It was even a secret to his family. He was, it was said, a youth of much promise, and of gentle manners, who, having made an imprudent match, had, from jealousy, or some other cause, deserted his wife and fled his country. This was all that was known of Alan Rookwood.

The young Sir Reginald had attended Charles in the character of page during his exile, and if he could not requite the devotion of the son by absolutely reinstating the fallen fortunes of the father, the Monarch could at least accord him the fostering influence of his favour and countenance, and bestow upon him certain lucrative situations in his household, as an earnest of his good-will; and thus much he did. Remarkable for his

personal attractions in youth, it is not to be wondered at that we should find the name of Reginald Rookwood recorded in the scandalous chronicles of the day, as belonging to a cavalier of infinite address and discretion, matchless wit and marvellous pleasantry, and eminent beyond his peers for his successes with some of the most distinguished beauties that graced that voluptuous court.

A career of elegant dissipation ended in matrimony. His first match was unpropitious. Foiled in his attempts upon the chastity of a lady of great beauty and high honour, he was rash enough to marry her: rash enough, we say, for from that fatal hour all became as darkness; the curtain fell upon the comedy of his life, to rise to tragic horrors. When passion subsided, repentance awoke, and he became anxious for deliverance from the yoke he had so heedlessly imposed on himself and on his unfortunate lady. Her's was a wretched life of sufferance from domestic tyranny and oppression; but it was brief; and if her sorrows were manifold, they were not of long endurance.

The hapless lady of Sir Reginald was a fair and fragile creature, floating in the eddying current of existence, and hurried to destruction as the summer gossamer is swept away by the rude breeze and lost for ever. So beautiful, so gentle was she, that if

Sorrow had not made
Sorrow more beautiful than beauty's self,

it would have been difficult to say whether the charm of softness, and sweetness, was more to be admired than her faultless personal attractions; but when a tinge of sorrow came saddening and shading the once smooth and smiling brow—when tears dimmed the blue beauty of those deep and tender eyes—when hot, hectic flushes supplied the place of healthful bloom, and despair took possession of her heart, then was it seen *what* was the charm of Lady Rookwood, if charm that could be called, which was a saddening sight to see, and melted the beholder's soul within him; and all acknowledged, that exquisite as she had been before, the sad, sweet lady, was now more exquisite still.

Seven moons had waned and flown—seven bitter, tearful moons—and each day Lady Rookwood's situation claimed more soothing attention at the hand of her lord. She had it not. Fascinating as sin was Sir Reginald, if it pleased him; ruthless as the striped tiger, if not in the mood to restrain himself.

About this time his wife's brother, whom he hated, returned from the Dutch wars. Struck with his sister's altered appearance, he readily divined the cause: indeed, all tongues were eager to proclaim it to him. Passionately attached to her, Lionel Vavasour implored an explanation of the cause of his sister's griefs. The bewildered lady answered evasively, attributing her wo-begone looks to any other cause than her husband's cruelty, and pressing her brother, as he valued her peace, her affection, never to allude to the subject again. The fiery youth departed; he next sought out his brother-in-law, and taxed him sharply with his inhumanity, adding threats to his upbraidings. Sir Reginald listened silently and calmly. When the other had finished, with a sarcastic obeisance, he replied, "Sir, I am much beholden for the trouble you have taken in your sister's behalf; but when she entrusted herself to my keeping, she relinquished, I conceive, all claim on *your* guardianship: however, I thank you in her name, for the trouble you have taken, but for your own sake, I would venture, as a friend, to caution you against a repetition of interference like the present."

"Interference! Sir Reginald?"

"Interference, Sir, was my word; unwarrantable impertinence were perhaps the more suitable phrase. I give you your choice; but would again renew my caution."

"And I, Sir, caution *you*. See that you give heed to my words, or, by the living God, I will enforce attention to them."

"You will find me, Sir, as prompt at all times to defend my conduct, as I am unalterable in my purposes. I love your sister not. I loathe her. She is my wife; what more would you have? Were she a harlot, you should have her back and welcome; but the fool is virtuous. Devise some scheme, and take her with you hence—so you rid *me* of her, I am content."

"Sir Reginald, you are a villain."

"Go on."

"A ruffian."

"Proceed, I pray you."

"A dastard! will nothing rouse you?" and Vavasour spat upon his brother's cheek.

Sir Reginald's eyes blazed. His sword started from its scabbard. "Defend yourself," he exclaimed, furiously attacking Vavasour. Pass after pass was exchanged; fierce thrusts made and parried; feint and appeal, the most desperate and dexterous resorted to; their swords glanced like lightning flashes; till in the struggle the blades became entangled. There was a moment's cessation; each glanced at the other with deadly inextinguishable hate. Both were admirable masters of defence; both so brimful of wrath as to be regardless of consequences. They tore back their weapons. Vavasour's blade shivered. He was at the mercy of his adversary—an adversary

who knew no mercy. Sir Reginald's rapier was instantly passed through his body, the hilt striking against his ribs.

Sir Reginald's ire was kindled, not extinguished, by the deed he had done; like the tiger, he had tasted blood. He sought his home. He was greeted by his wife. Terrified by his looks, she yet summoned courage sufficient to approach him. She embraced his arm—she clasped his hand. Sir Reginald smiled. It was cutting as his dagger's edge.

"What ails you, sweetheart?" he said.

"I know not, your smiles frighten me."

"My smiles frighten you—fool! be thankful that I frown not."

"Oh! do not frown. Be gentle, my Reginald, as you were when first I knew you. Smile not so sternly, but as you did then, that I may, for one instant, dream you love me, as you swore you did."

"Dream that I love you!"

"Ay, dream, my Reginald; it is no longer a reality. I feel your love is gone—that I have lost — But oh! let me not think you are utter insensible to me. Smile! smile! if but for a moment."

"Silly wench! There I *do* smile."

"That smile chills me—freezes me. Oh Reginald! could you but know what I have endured this morning on your account. My brother Lionel has been here."

"Well!"

"Nay, look not so. He insisted on knowing the reason of my altered appearance."

"And no doubt you made him acquainted with the cause. You told him *your* version of the story."

"Not a word, as I hope to live."

"A lie."

"By my truth, no."

"A lie, I say; he vouched it to me himself."

"Impossible! He could not."

"Tis a tale he will not repeat."

"Not repeat? He would not, I am sure, give utterance to any scandal. You do but try me. Reginald, I never saw you thus—never before. Ha! what is this? Your hand is bloody. As you hope for heaven's mercy, speak, I implore you. You have not harmed him? He is well. He is well. Whose blood is this?"

"He spat upon my cheek—I have washed out the stain—"

"Then it *is* his," shrieked Lady Rookwood, pressing her hands shudderingly before her eyes. "Is he dead?"

Sir Reginald turned away.

"Stay," cried she, exerting her feeble strength to retain him, and becoming white as ashes, "stay, thou thing of blood! thou cruel and perjured one! abide, and hear me. Me thou

hast killed, I feel, with thy unkindness. I have striven against it, but it would not avail. I am sinking fast—dying: I, who loved thee, only thee; yea, one beside—my brother, and thou hast slain *him*. Thy hands are dripping in his blood, and I kissed them, have clasped them. And now," continued she, with an energy that shook Sir Reginald, "I hate thee—I abhor thee—I renounce thee—for ever! May my dying words ring in thine ears on thy death-bed, for that hour *will* come. Thou can'st not shun *that*. Then think of *him*! think of *me*!

"Away," interrupted Sir Reginald, endeavouring to shake her off.

"I will not away! I will cling to thee.—I will curse thee. My unborn child shall live to visit my wrongs on thee and thine. Weak as I am, thou shalt not cast me off. Thou shalt learn to fear even *me*."

"I fear nothing living, much less a frantic woman."

"Fear the *dead* then."

"Hence! or by the God above us —"

"Never!"

There was a struggle—a blow—and the wretched lady sank, shrieking, upon the floor. Convulsions seized her; a mother's pains succeeded fierce and fast. She spoke no more, but died within the hour, giving birth to a female child.

Eleanor Rookwood lived to fulfil her mother's boding words. She became her father's idol—her father's bane. All the love he had to bestow was centred in her; she returned it not. She fled from his caresses. Inheriting none of her mother's gentleness, she had all her mother's beauty—with all her father's pride. His every thought was for his daughter—for her aggrandizement—all in vain. She seemed only to endure him, while his affection waxed stronger, and entwined itself round her alone; yet she shrank from his embraces as the shrub from the killing folds of the parasite plant. She grew towards womanhood. Suitors thronged around her—gentle and noble ones. Sir Reginald watched them with a jealous eye. He was wealthy—powerful—high in royal favour;—and could make his own election—he did so. For the first time, Eleanor promised obedience to his wishes. They accorded with her own humour. The day was appointed—it came—but with it came not the bride. She had fled, with the humblest and the meanest of the pretenders to her hand—with one upon whom Sir Reginald supposed she had not deigned to cast her eyes. He endeavoured to forget her, and to all outward seeming was successful to the effort; but he felt that the curse was upon him, the undying flame scorched his heart. Once and once only they met again, in a foreign land, whither she had wandered. It was a dread encounter—terrible to both; but most so to Sir Reginald. He spoke not of her afterwards.

Shortly after the death of his first wife, Sir Reginald made

proposals to a dowager of distinction, with a handsome jointure, one of his early attachments, and was without scruple accepted. The power of the family might then be said to have been at its zenith, and but for certain untoward circumstances, and the growing influence of his enemies, Sir Reginald would have been elevated to the peerage. Like most reformed spendthrifts, he had become proportionately avaricious, and his mind seemed engrossed in the accumulation of wealth. In the meantime, his second wife followed her predecessor, dying, it was said, of vexation and disappointment.

The propensity to polygamy, always a distinguishing characteristic of the Rookwoods, largely displayed itself in Sir Reginald. Another lady followed—equally rich, younger, and far more beautiful than her immediate predecessor. She was a prodigious flirt, and soon set her husband at defiance. Sir Reginald did not condescend to expostulate. It was not his way. He effectually prevented any recurrence. She was removed, and with her expired Sir Reginald's waning popularity. So strong was the expression of odium against him, that he thought it prudent to retire to his mansion in the country, and there altogether seclude himself. One anomaly in Sir Reginald's otherwise utterly selfish character, was uncompromising devotion to the House of Stuart; and shortly after the abdication of James II., he followed that monarch to St. Germain, having previously mixed largely in secret political intrigues; and only returned from the French Court to lay his bones with those of his ancestry, in the family vault at Rookwood.

Sir Reginald died, leaving three children, a daughter, the before-mentioned Eleanor (who, entirely discountenanced by the family, had been seemingly forgotten by all but her father,) and two sons by his third wife. Reginald, the eldest, whose military taste had early procured him the command of a company of horse, and whose politics did not coalesce with those of his sire, fell, during his father's lifetime, at Killycrankie, under the banners of William; Piers, therefore, the second son, succeeded to the baronetcy. A very different character, in many respects, to his father and brother, holding in supreme contempt courts and courtiers, party warfare, political intrigue, and all the subtleties of jesuitical diplomacy; neither having any inordinate relish for camps and campaigns; he yet displayed in early life one family propensity, *viz.* unremitting devotion to the sex; and if he rejoiced not in a like uxorial latitude, yet were his mistresses numberless. Subsequently he allied himself to Mande, only daughter of Sir Thomas D'Aubeney, the last of a line as proud and intolerant as his own. The tables were then turned; Lady Rookwood usurped sovereign sway over her lord, and Sir Piers, a cipher in his own house, scarce master of himself, much less of his dame, endured an existence so infinitely miserable, that he was often heard to regret, in his

cups, that he had not inherited, with the estate of his forefathers, the family secret of shaking off the matrimonial yoke, when found to press too hardly.

At the onset Sir Piers struggled hard to burst his bondage, but in vain—he was fast fettered, and only bruised himself against the bars of his prison-house. Abandoning all further effort at emancipation, he gave himself up to the usual resource of a weak mind—ebriety; he drank so deeply to drown his cares, that in the end his hale constitution yielded to his excesses. Sir Piers was a good-humoured man in the main: he had little of the old Rookwood leaven about him, and had been liked by his associates; but of late his temper became soured, and his friends deserted him; for between his domestic annoyances, remorseful feelings, and the inroads already made upon his health by constant inebriety, he grew so desperate and insane in his revels, and committed such fearful extravagancies, that even his boon companions shrank from his orgies. Fearful were the scenes between him and Lady Rookwood upon these occasions—appalling to the witnesses, dreadful to themselves; and it was perhaps their frequent recurrence, that, more than anything else, banished all decent society from Rookwood.

At the time of Sir Piers' decease, which brings us down to the date of our story, his son and successor, Ranulph, was absent on his travels. Shortly after the completion of his academical education, he had departed to make the tour of the Continent, and had been absent rather better than a year. He had quitted his father in displeasure, and was destined never again to see his face while living. The last intelligence received of young Rookwood was from Bourdeaux, whence it was thought he had departed for the Pyrenees. A special messenger had been despatched in search of him, with tidings of the melancholy event: but as it was deemed improbable, by Lady Rookwood, that her son could return within any reasonable space, she ordered that the accomplishment of the last rites to be paid to her husband should take place on the night of the sixth day after his decease (for it may be here remarked, that it was the custom of the Rookwoods ever to inter their dead at midnight), entrusting its solemnization entirely to the care of one of Sir Piers' retainers, for which she was greatly scandalized in the neighbourhood.

A youth of goodly promise was Ranulph Rookwood. The stock from which he sprang would on neither side warrant such conclusion, nor hold out hopes of any such fulfilment; yet sometimes it happens that from the darkest elements are compounded the brightest and subtlest substances: and so it appeared to be in this instance. Fair, frank, and free—generous, open, unsuspicious—he seemed the very opposite of all his race—their antagonizing principle. Capriciously indulgent, his father had allowed him ample means, neither curbing nor

restraining his expenditure; acceding at one moment to every inclination, every project, and the next negating all. It was impossible, therefore, for him, in such a state of things, to act decidedly, without incurring his father's displeasure; and even the only measure he resolved upon, which was to absent himself for a time, was conjectured to have brought about the result he had endeavoured to avoid. Other reasons there were, which secretly influenced him; which it will be our business in due time to detail.

Much of this might be traced to the policy of Lady Rookwood. Of late, whatever plans she had laid out for her son, had been opposed by Sir Piers, who was resolved to thwart and gall her in her only apparently sensible part; and hence the endless bickerings we have noticed. There might be another latent motive; but this, if any such existed, Sir Piers kept to himself. After his son's departure, he supplied him plentifully with money; but it was observed, by those about him, that he meditated some great change in the distribution of his property, even during his lifetime, when the suddenness of his removal, by death, prevented the completion of his designs.

The time of the sad ceremonial drew nigh. The hurrying of the domestics to and fro—the multifarious arrangements for the night—the distribution of the melancholy trappings, and the discussion of the concomitant *comestibles*, furnished abundant occupation within doors; without, there was a constant and continual stream of the tenantry, thronging down the avenue, with an occasional horseman, once or twice intercepted by a large, lumbering carriage, bringing friends of the deceased, some really anxious to pay the last tribute of regard, but the majority attracted by the anticipated spectacle of a funeral by torchlight. There were others, indeed, to whom it was not matter of choice; who were compelled, by a vassal tenure of their lands, held of the house of Rookwood, to lend a shoulder to the coffin, and a hand to the torch, on the burial of its lord. Of these there was a plentiful muster collected in the hall; they were to be marshalled by Peter Bradley, who was deemed to be well skilled in such proceedings. That personage, however, had not made his appearance, to the great dismay of the assemblage. Scouts were sent in search of him, but they returned with the intelligence, that the door of his habitation was fastened, and its inmate apparently absent; other tidings of the truant sexton could not be obtained.

It was a sultry August evening—no breeze was stirring in the garden—no cool dews refreshed the parched and heated earth—yet, from the languishing flowers rich sweets exhaled; the splash of the fountain fell pleasantly upon the ear, conveying in its sound a sense of freshness to the fervid air—while deep and drowsy murmurs hummed heavily beneath the trees, making the twilight slumberously musical. The westering sun, which had filled the atmosphere with flame throughout the

day, was now wildly setting; and, as he sank behind the hall, its varied and beautiful tracery became each instant more darkly and distinctly defined, as relieved against the burnished sky.

At this juncture a little gate, communicating with the park, was thrown open, and some one entered the garden, passing through the shrubbery, and not checking his rapid steps till he arrived at a vista opening upon the house: there he stopped. The spot at which he halted, was marked by a little basin, scantily supplied with water, streaming from a lion's kingly jaws. The stranger threw himself upon an adjoining seat. His dress was travel-soiled, and dusty, and his whole appearance betokened great exhaustion, from heat and fatigue. As he threw off his riding-cap, and unclasped his throat collar, he displayed a finely turned head and neck, and a countenance which, besides its beauty, had that rare nobility of feature, which seldom indeed falls to the lot of the proudest patrician, but it is never seen in one of an inferior order. A restless inquietude of manner showed that he was suffering from over-excitement of mind, as well as from bodily exertion. His look was wild and hurried—his waving ringlets were dashed heedlessly over a pallid, lofty brow, upon which care was prematurely written, while his black melancholy eyes were bent, with a look almost of agony, upon the house before him.

"And it was here," murmured the youthful stranger, "that we parted, never again to meet—here he left me in anger and unkindness—and here, upon this very spot, I tarried till the sun had gone down upon his wrath, even as it is now going down upon his grave—and he returned not! And that farewell—that dreadful farewell, was to be our last! Great God!—had I but thought it—that I should have departed without his blessing—without his forgiveness. But the past is irrevocable. Oh! for one half hour with him, were it terrible as the night when—but I will not think of *that*. I must believe it now—the dark dreadful confirmation is there. In yon mansion death stares at me through every casement—grins at me in my path—my father lies dead within! If even the dead cannot rest, why need the living trouble themselves? That twilight sky—yon setting sun—why do they fill me with forebodings?—why does the air seem thick—the trees grow black—the clouds turn crimson? 'Tis death!—death every where!—around me—about me—my existence is poisoned. I have obeyed the call—I am here—what more remains to do?"

And, as if struggling against violent emotions, and some overwhelming remembrance, the young man arose, and plunged his hand into the basin, applying the moist element to his burning brow. Apparently becoming more calm, he bent his steps towards the hall, when two figures, suddenly issuing from an adjoining walk, arrested his progress: neither saw him.

After a brief parley, one of the figures disappeared within shrubbery, and the other, confronting the stranger, displayed the harsh features and gaunt form of Peter Bradley. Hadter encountered his dead master in corporeal presence, he could not have manifested more surprise than he exhibited for a instant or two, as he shrank back from the path as the stranger passed him with a low greeting, taking his way towards the hall.

"Wonder upon wonders!" ejaculated the sexton, recovering speech; "young Ranulph here!—what could have brought hither, now? What but fate? The hour I have so long dreaded is fast coming; but Luke should know this—he may still within hearing; I'll try—" and he whistled down the shrubbery—"No—he is gone—it would be too much trouble to find for him—besides, he must take his chance—I can only find him so far—Destiny must do the rest. And who shall say what his shall be? Not I. I can only speculate—only guess—only laugh. I know better than to interfere with man's doom, and yet I should like to see young Ranulph palm. I might give a guess from that, what would be the shot of this business. It will be a hard game. Ha! What says the old jingle:

When the stray Rook shall perch on the topmost bough,
There shall be clamour and screeching I trow;
But of right to, and rule of the ancient nest,
The Rook that with Rook mates shall hold him possess.

which is a riddle I scarce can read, though I have some guess of it. Oh! this is beautiful—delightful! and now for merry mourners. They're drunk I hope by this time—in which case they'll do their business so much the better, and not shed tears out of season."

And he crawled, mutteringly, on to the hall.

CHAPTER V.

On pain of death let no man name death to me,
It is a word most infinitely terrible.—

THE WHITE DEVIL

AN hour or two prior to the rencontre just described, in a small cosy apartment of the hall, nominally devoted to judiciary business by its late proprietor, but, in reality, used as

sanctum snuggery, or smoking room, an odd triumvirate were assembled, fraught with the ulterior view of attending the funeral obsequies of their deceased patron and friend, though immediately occupied in the discussion of a stoup of excellent claret, the *bouquet* of which perfumed the air like the fragrance of a bed of violets.

This little room had been poor Sir Piers's favourite retreat; it was, in fact, the only room in the house that he could call his own; and thither would he often, with pipe and punch, beguile the flagging hours, secure from interruption. A snug, old-fashioned apartment it was, wainscotted with rich, black oak, against which stood a fine old cabinet of the same material, and a line or two of crazy worm-eaten book-shelves, loaded with sundry, dusty, unconsulted law tomes, and a slight sprinkling of the elder divines, equally neglected. The only book, indeed, Sir Piers ever read, was Burton, and him only because the quaint, racy style of the learned old hypochondriac suited his humour at seasons, and gave a zest to his melancholy, such as the olives lent to his wine.

Four portraits adorned the walls; those of Sir Reginald Rookwood and his wives. The ladies were attired in the flowing drapery of Charles's day, the snow of their radiant bosoms somewhat sullied by over exposure, and the vermeil tinting of their cheeks darkened by the fumes of tobacco. There was a shepherdess, with her taper crook, whose large, languishing eyes, ripe pouting lips, ready to melt into kisses, and air of voluptuous elegance, was anything but suitable to the innocent, unsophisticated simplicity of her costume. She was portrayed tending her flock of downy sheep, with azure ribbons round their necks, accompanied by one of those invaluable little dogs, whose length of ear and delicacy of spot evinced him perfect in his breeding, but whose large-eyed indifference to his charge, proved him to be as much out of character with his situation, as the refined and luxuriant charms of his mistress were out of keeping with her artless attire. This was Sir Piers's mother, the third wife, a beautiful woman, answering to the notion of one who had been somewhat of a flirt in her day. Next to her was a magnificent dame, with the throat and arm of a Junc, and a superb bust (the bust was, then, what the bustle is now—a paramount attraction—whether the modification be an improvement, we leave to the consideration of the lovers of the beautiful)—this was the dowager. Lastly, there was the sweet, delicate Eleanor, with eyes serenely soft—"as a star in water," blue as the depths of a summer's eve, and a form as light and lovely as that of a sylph. Every gentle grace had been stamped in undying beauty on the canvass by the hand of Lely, breathing a spell upon the picture, almost as witching as that which had dwelt around the exquisite original. Over the high carved mantle-piece was suspended the portrait of Sir Reginald. It

had been painted in early youth; the features were be-
 disdainful—with a fierceness breaking through the countenance.
 The eyes were very fine, large, black as midnight, and
 those of Cæsar Borgia, in Raphael's unrivalled picture
 Borghese Palace at Rome. They seemed to rivet the gaze
 to follow him whithersoever he went, to search into his soul,
 as did the dark orbs of Sir Reginald lifetime. It was the work
 of Vandyck, and had all the and breathing verisimilitude
 of that great master; nor the noble countenance of Sir
 Reginald unworthy the painter.

No portrait of Sir Piers was to be met with; but in
 one, depending from a pair of buck's horns, hung the
 knight's stained scarlet coat (the same in which he had
 fought, with the intent to hunt, on the eventful morn-
 ington by Peter Bradley,) his velvet cap, his buck-
 whip, and the residue of his equipment for the chase.
 The attire was reviewed with melancholy interest and un-
 emotion by the company, as reminding them forcibly of
 the part, of which it seemed a portion.

The party consisted of the Vicar of Rookwood, Dr
 phemus Polycarp Small, and Titus Tyrconnel, an emigré
 empirical professor of medicine, from the sister isle,
 convivial habits had first introduced him to the hall, and
 wards retained him there. Mr. Cecil Coates, attorney-
 bailiff, and receiver, completed the trio. We were w
 saying that Titus Tyrconnel was *retained*. He was a
 dent, intrusive fellow, whom, having once gained a foot-
 the house, it was impossible to dislodge. He cared for
 sult—perceived no slight—and professed, in her presence,
 profoundest respect for Lady Rookwood: in short, he was
 ready to do anything but depart.

Sir Piers was one of those people who cannot dine
 He disliked a solitary repast, almost as much as a *tête-à-tête*
 with his lady. He would have been recognized at once
 true Amphytrion, had any one been hardy enough to play
 part of Jupiter. Ever ready to give a dinner, he found
 culty arise, not usually experienced on such occasions
 was no one wherewithal to partake of it. He had the
 wine, kept an excellent table, was himself no niggard
 but his own merits, and those of his table, were forged
 the invariable *pendant* to the feast; and the best of wine
 flavour when the last bottle found its way to the guest.
 Dine alone, Sir Piers would not; and as his old friends
 him, he plunged lower in his search for society, con-
 within his house a class of persons whom no one would
 expected to meet at Rookwood, nor its owner have ch
 its inmates, had any choice remained to him. He did
 dure this state of things without much outward show of

Anything for a quiet life," was his constant saying; the generality of people with whom those words formed a maxim, he led the most uneasy life imaginable. To excite commiseration, must be uncomplaining—grieved of the gentle sex should remember this. Sir Piers endured, but he grumbled lustily, and was on all hands bore; domestic grievances, especially if the husband be stiff, being the most intolerable of all mentionable misadventures, (for there is a bathos of beyond soda-water,) Sir Piers was the most injured of men, and consequently the most wearisome. No wonder that his friends deserted him; still there was Titus—his ears and lips were ever open to pathos and to so Titus kept his station. Immediately after her husband's death, it had been Lady Rookwood's intention to clear the house of all the vermin, so she expressed herself, that had infested it; and forcibly to eject Titus, and one or two stragglers of the same class. But in consequence of orders received from Mr. Coates, who represented to her the necessity of complying with Sir Pier's testamentary wishes, which were particular in that respect, she thought to defer her intentions until after the ceremonial of interment could be completed; and in the mean time, strange to say, she submitted its arrangement to Titus Tyrconnel; who, ever ready to accommodate, accepted, nothing loth, the charge, and discharged himself admirably well in his undertaking; especially, he said, "in the eating and drinking part of the transaction, the most essential part of all." He kept open house—open to all comers—resolved that his patron's funeral should be as much as possible an Irish burial on a grand scale, the best sight in the whole world," again to borrow his own

proposition was offered to these proceedings by Lady Rookwood. She had given Titus the keys of the cellar, saying to her attendant Agnes—"they might wallow in wine if they like swine, as they were—it was Sir Pier's will—they were to be done in accordance with his intentions, which they fulfilled to the letter. The period, required by the law, would soon pass—she would then easily rid herself of them." Titus, conscious of the importance of his office—inflamed with the thought of Titus, like a "robustious periwig-pated" Alderman, at a civic feast. The natural rubicundity of his rosy complexion was increased to a deep purple tint, like that of a wine peony, while his ludicrous dignity was augmented by his wearing suit of sables, in which his portly person was in-

his first magnum had been discussed in solemn silence; the bottle, however, which hung over the conclave, disappeared, and the genial influence of "another and a better" bottle,

and gave place to a denser vapour, occasioned by the introduction of the pipe, and its accompaniments.

Esconced in a comfortable old chair (it is not every old chair that *is* comfortable), with pipe in mouth, and with full unbuttoned ease, his bushy, buzz wig laid aside by reason of the heat, reposed Dr. Small. Small, indeed, was somewhat of a misnomer, as applied to the worthy doctor, who, besides being no diminutive specimen of his kind, entertained no insignificant opinion of himself. His height was certainly not remarkable; but his width of shoulder—his sesquipedality of stomach—and obesity of calf—these were unique! Of his origin, we know nothing; but presume he must, in some way or other, have been connected with that numerous family “the Smalls,” who, according to Christopher North, form the predominant portion of mankind.

In appearance, the doctor was short-necked, and puffy, with a sodden face, wherein were set eyes, whose obliquity of vision was, in a measure, redeemed by their expression of humour. He was accounted a man of parts and erudition, and had obtained high honours at his university. Rigidly orthodox, he abominated the very name of papist; amongst which heretical herd he classed his companion, Mr. Titus Tyrconnel—Ireland being with him synonymous with superstition and Catholicism—and every Irishman rebellious and schismatical; on this subject he was inclined to be disputatious. His prejudices did not prevent him from passing the claret, nor from his laughing as heartily as a plethoric asthma, and sense of decorum due to the occasion would permit, at the quips and quirks of the Irishman, who, he admitted, notwithstanding his heresies, was a pleasant fellow in the main. And when, in addition to the flattery, a pipe had been insinuated by the officious Titus, at the precise moment when Small yearned for his afternoon’s solace, but scrupled to ask for, or indulge in it—when the door had been made fast, and the first whiff exhaled, all his migivings vanished, and he surrendered himself to the soft seduction. In this elysian state we find him.

“Ah! you may say that, Doctor Small,” said he, in answer to some observation of the vicar, “that’s a most original apophthegm. We all of us *hould* our lives by a *thridd*. Och! many’s the sudden finale I have seen. Many’s the fine fellow’s heels tripped up unawares, when least expected. Death hangs over our heads by a single hair, as your reverence says, precisely like the sword of Dan MacIise*, the flatterer of Dinnish, what do you call him, ready to fall at a moment’s notice, or at no notice at all eh?—Mr. Coates. And that brings me back again to Sir Piers—poor gentleman—ah! we shan’t soon see the like of him again.”

“Poor Sir Piers!” said Mr. Coates, a wee man, with a brown

* Query, Damocles? *Printer’s Devil.*

ab, and a face red and round as an apple, and almost as small, it is to be regretted, that his over conviviality should so much have hastened his lamented demise."

"Conviviality!" replied Titus; "no such thing—it was apoplexy—extravaseation of *sacrum*."

"Extra vase-ation of rum and water, you mean," replied Coates, who, like all attorneys, rejoiced in a quibble.

"The squire's ailment," continued Titus, "was a sanguineous effusion, as we call it—positive determination of blood to the head, occasioned by a low way he got into just before his attack—a confirmed case of hypochondriasis, as that *ould* book Sir Piers was so fond of, denominates the blue devils; he neglected the bottle, which, in a man who has been a hard drinker all his life, is a bad sign. The lowering system never answers—never. Doctor, I'll just trouble you"—for Small, in a fit of absence, had omitted to pass the bottle, though not to help himself. "Had he stuck to *this*"—holding up a glass of ruby bright—"the elixir vitæ—the grand panacea—he might have been hale and hearty at this present moment, and as well as any of us—but he wouldn't be advised. To my thinking, as that was the case, he'd have been all the better for a little of your Reverence's *sperrtual* advice; and his conscience having been relieved, by confession, and absolution, he might have opened a fresh account, with an *aisy* heart and *clane* breast."

"I trust, Sir," said Small, withdrawing his pipe from his lips, "that Sir Piers Rookwood addressed himself to a higher source than to a sinning creature of clay like himself for mediation with his Creator for remission of his sin; but were there any load of secret guilt that might have weighed heavy upon his conscience, it is to be regretted that he refused the last offices of the church, and died incommunicate. I was denied all admittance to his chamber."

"Exactly my case," said Mr. Coates; "I was refused entrance, though my business was of the utmost importance—certain dispositions—special bequests—for though the estate is entailed, yet still there are charges. You understand me—very strange to refuse to see me. Some people may regret it—may live to regret it, I say—that's all. I've just sent up a package to Lady Rookwood, which was not to be delivered till after Sir Pier's death. Odd circumstance that—been in my custody a long while. Some reason to think the squire meant to alter his will—ought to have seen *me*—sad neglect."

"More's the pity—but it was none of poor Sir Pier's doings!" replied Titus; "he had no will of his own, poor fellow, even on his death-bed; it was all *her* doing, Lady Rookwood's," added he, in a whisper. "I, his medical adviser, and confidential friend, was ordered out of the room, and although I knew it was as much as his life was worth to leave him for a moment in that state, I was forced to comply; and, would you

believe it, as I left the room, I heard high words. Yes Doctor, as I hope to be saved, words of anger from her at this terrible time."

The latter part of this speech was uttered in a low tone, and in a very mysterious manner. The speakers drew so closely together, that the bowls of their pipes formed a common centre, whence the stems radiated. A momentary silence ensued, during which each man puffed for very life. Small next knocked the ashes from his tube, and began to replenish, coughing significantly. Mr. Coates expelled a thin curling stream of vapour from a minute orifice in the corner of his almost invisible mouth, and raised his eyebrows, fraught with expectation: all seemed spell-bound. On the strength of a bumper, which he swallowed, Titus mustered resolution to break the charm.

"Och, Sirs!" said he, in a cautious whisper, as if afraid lest the very walls should betray him, "Lady Rookwood's an awful woman—an awful woman—a fit mate for Beelzebub himself, if he wer'nt a devilish deal too cunning to take a wife. I'll just tell you what happened. We all of us know the sort of life she led poor Sir Piers. But, as I was saying, if there was no love lost between them during life, one would think the near approach of death might set all to rest: no such thing. When I came back to the room, there lay the squire, in a sort of trance, and she glaring at him like a tigress—so savage—so full of spite and malice, and devilish rejoicing, my blood ran cold to witness it."

Small shook his head, muttering some monosyllabic interjection, that sounded very like an oath. Mr. Coates looked unutterable things, but said nothing, with the characteristic caution of his tribe.

"I approached the bed-side," resumed Titus, "as I don't care to confess, with fear and trepidation; for though the man does not live who can say 'Titus Tyrconnel dreads him, somehow or other there is that in her ladyship I never could get over—and which petrifies me entirely. However, I went up to the bed, and took hold of the dying man's hand. Sinking as he was, the pressure roused him; whether or not he thought that his wife relented towards him, I can't say; a slight, sweet smile played upon his features—a faint motion was perceptible in his lips; he tried to fix his gaze upon me, and when, through the gathering film, he perceived who it was, he shuddered sensibly, and his eyes filled with tears. Damme, but my own are blinded, now, to think of it. 'Sir Piers,' says I to him 'be calm—be composed—'tis only I, Titus Tyrconnel.'—'I cannot be composed,' gasped he. 'I cannot die, unless I am at peace.'—'Give him laudanum,' said Lady Rookwood; 'her is the phial, it will abridge his sufferings.'—'Oh, no—no,' said Piers, with a look of horror I shall never forget, and strugglin

for utterance—'do not give me *that*—let me live, if only for a few moments.' And he sunk back senseless on his pillow, as I cast away the phial. I was soon roused from a moment's stupor I had been thrown into, by her ladyship, who apparently was not much pleased with my proceeding; indeed she told me as much—but, frightened as I was at her, I could not help saying, I thought it was not like a Christian, to harbour hatred at such a moment; and that whatever difference there was betwixt them, she *ought* to be reconciled to her husband, before reconciliation should be impossible. Och, Sirs! I wish you had seen her. She said not a word in reply, but slowly quitted the room, and returned not till after the Squire's departure. I should like to know, Dochter, of what stuff her heart is made. Now I know what it is to hate and despise, and may be, when I'm roused, seeing that I'm an Irishman, I could knock out a man's brains with all the pleasure in life; but to see a fellow-creature expiring (which was not without a long and a terrible struggle, all occasioned by her conduct), before one's eyes, and not extend the hand of forgiveness to him—if so doing would ease his parting pang—'tis barbarous, and unnatural."

"Sir," said Doctor Small, with emphasis, laying down his pipe, "it's damnable—enough to draw down a judgment; such conduct can only be excused on the ground of insanity; the woman must be mad."

"I'll swear to it," interposed Titus, "she *is* mad."

"I shall think it my duty to advise young Sir Ranulph to take a out writ *de lunatico inquirendo*," said the lawyer, his keen little eyes twinkling; "he would be glad, I am sure to have her out of the way."

"Ah! we've a beautiful way, in my country, of managing unruly women," said Titus with a knowing wink; "we break 'em in young—take the vice out of 'em early." Saying which, he filled himself a bumper of claret.

"Alas! I fear poor Sir Piers was not so well prepared as he should have been, for his removal from this world," said Mr. Coates, after a pause.

"I fear so, indeed," returned Small; "his seizure was sudden and severe. When the conscience is not altogether void of offence (though far be it from me to make this assertion in reference to Sir Piers), the approach of death is a dreadful contemplation—the change is fearful to all—but, in that case, truly formidable and appalling.

Heu quantum pœne misero mens conscia donat
Quòd Styga, quòd Manes, infestaque Tartara somnis
Videt!—

"That's a powerful picture, Doctor," said Titus, "so far as I can comprehend it, and a true representation, I'm grieved to say, of the last moments of poor Sir Piers. I have not tould

you half of the horror of that scene, nor can I describe it. His pangs were dreadful. There must have been something," continued Titus, again assuming a mysterious manner, and lowering the tone of his voice, "something frightful upon his mind—some—nay, there's no use mincing the matter with you—in a word, then some *crime*, too deep to be divulged."

"Crime!" exclaimed Coates and the Doctor, at one and the same time.

"Ay, crime!" repeated Titus, in the same under tone—"hush! not so loud, lest any one hear us. Poor fellow, he's dead now. I'm shure you both loved him as I did—and pity him and pardon him, if he was guilty. Och! it was a terrible ending. Listen, and you shall hear. When Lady Reekwood had left the room, as I said before, what does Sir Piers do, but, ill as he was, leaps straight out of bed, before I could prevent him, and, staggering to the door, locks it—yes, locks it, fast—and then cries out to me to help him. 'She shall not poison me,' said he: 'I will live out the brief remainder of my life—hell upon earth is more tolerable than hell to come.' With that I got him into bed—and he began to rave and shout—his delirium all coming back again. I knew death was not far off, then. One minute he was in the chase, cheering on the hounds. 'Halloo! tallyho!' cried he; 'who clears that fence!—who swims that stream?' The next, he was drinking, carousing, and hurraing, at the head of his table. 'Hip! hip! hip!'—as mad, and wild, and frantic, as ever he used to be, when wine had got the better of him. And then all of a sudden, in the midst of his shouting, he stopped, exclaiming. 'What! here again?—who let her in?—the door is fast—I locked it myself. Devil, why did you open it? you have betrayed me—she will poison me—and I cannot resist. Ha! another! Who—who is that?—her face is white—her hair hangs about her shoulders—Is she alive again? Susan! Susan! why that look? You loved me well—too well. You will not drag me to perdition! You will not appear against me? No, no, no—it is not in your nature—you, whom I doted on, whom I loved—whom I—but I repented—I sorrowed—I prayed—*prayed!* Oh! oh! no prayers would avail. Pray for me, Susan—for ever. Your intercession may avail. It is not too late. I will do justice to all. Fetch me pen and ink—I will confess—she shall have all. Where is my sister? I would speak with her—would tell her—tell her. Call Peter Bradley—I shall die before I can tell it. Come hither,' said he to me. 'There is a dark, dreadful secret on my mind—it must forth. Tell my sister—no, my senses swim—Susan is near me—fury is in her eyes—keep her off. What is this white mass in my arms? what do I hold? is it the corpse by my side, as it lay that long, long night? It is—it is. Cold, stiff, stirless as then. White—horribly white—as when the moon, that would not set, showed all its ghast-

liness. Ah! it moves—it embraces me—it stifles—it suffocates me. Help! remove the pillow. I cannot breathe—I choke—oh!” The death rattle was in his throat—his eyes were fixed for ever! At that dreadful moment, either my ears deceived me, or I heard a sound of hollow laughter in the room; but whence it proceeded I was too much terrified to ascertain.”

A profound silence succeeded Tyrconnel’s narrative. Mr. Coates would not venture upon a remark. Doctor Small, seemed, for some minutes, lost in painful reflection: at length he spoke. “You have described a shocking scene, Mr. Tyrconnel, and in a manner that convinces me of its fidelity; but I trust you will excuse me, as a friend of the late Sir Piers, in requesting you to maintain silence in future on the subject. Its repetition can be productive of no good, and may do infinite harm, by giving currency to unpleasant reports, and harrowing the feelings of the survivors. Every one, acquainted with Sir Piers’ history, must be aware, as I dare say you are already, of an occurrence, which cast a shade over his early life, blighted his character, and endangered his personal safety. It was a dreadful accusation—but I believe, nay, I am sure, unfounded. Erring, Sir Piers was, undoubtedly; but I trust he was more weak than sinful. I have reason to think he was the tool of others. He is now gone, and with him let us bury his offences, and the remembrance of them. That his soul was heavily laden, would appear from your account of his last moments; yet I fervently trust that his repentance was sincere, in which case, there is hope of mercy for him. ‘At what time soever a sinner shall repent him of his sins, from the bottom of his heart, I will blot out all his wickedness out of his remembrance, with the Lord.’ God’s mercy is greater than man’s sins—and there is hope of salvation for Sir Piers.”

“I trust so, indeed,” said Titus; “and as to repating a syllable of what I have just said, devil a word more will I utter on the subject. My lips shall be shut, and sealed, as close as one of Mr. Coates’s bonds, for ever, hereafter: but I thought it just right to make you acquainted with the particulars. And now, having dismissed the bad for ever, I am ready to spake of Sir Pier’s good qualities, and not few they were. What was there, becoming a gentleman, that he could’nt do. I’d like to know? Could’nt he hunt as well as ever a one in the country? and hadn’t he as good a pack of hounds? Could’nt he shoot as well, and fish as well, and drink as well, or better? only he couldn’t carry his wine, which was his misfortune, not his fault. And wasn’t he always ready to ask a friend to dinner with him? And didn’t he give him a good dinner, when he came, barring the crosscups afterwards? And hadn’t he every thing agreeable about him, except his wife, which was a great drawback? And with all his peculiarities and humours, wasn’t he as kind-hearted a man as needs be? and an Irishman at the

core? And so, if he wern't dead, I'd say long life to him; but as he is, here's peace to his memory."

At this crisis of the conversation, a knocking was heard at the door, which some one without had vainly tried to open.

Titus rose to uncloset it, ushering in an individual known at the Hall as Jack Palmer.

CHAPTER VI.

Mrs. Peachum—Sure the Captain's the finest gentleman on the road.

BEGGAR'S OPERA.

JACK PALMER was a good-humoured, good-looking man, with immense, bushy, reddish coloured whiskers, a freckled, florid complexion, sandy hair, rather inclined to scantiness towards the scalp of the head, and garnishing the nape of his neck with a ruff of crisp little curls, like the ring on a monk's shaven crown. Notwithstanding this tendency to baldness, Jack could not be more than thirty, though his looks were some five years in advance. His face was one of these inexplicable countenances that seem proper to a peculiar class of men—a regular Newmarket physiognomy—compounded chiefly of cunning and assurance—not low cunning, nor vulgar assurance, but crafty sporting subtlety, careless as to results—in different to obstacles—ever on the alert for the main chance—game and turf all over—eager, yet easy—keen, yet quiet. He was somewhat showily dressed, in such a mode that he looked half like a fine gentleman of that day, half like a jockey of ours—his nether man appeared in well-fitting, well-worn buckskin, and boots with tops, not unconscious of the saddle; while the airy extravagance of his sky-blue riding-coat, the richness of his vest, the pockets whereof were beautifully exuberant, according to the fashion of the period: the smart luxuriance of his shirt-frill of the finest cambric, and a certain curious taste in the size and style of his buttons, proclaimed that, in his own esteem at least, his person did not appear altogether unworthy of adornment: nor, in justice to Jack, must we say he was in error. He was a model of a man for five feet ten; square, compact, capitally built in every particular, excepting that his legs were the slightest bit embowed, which defect probably arose from his being almost constantly on horseback—a sort of exercise in which Jack greatly delighted, and was accounted a superb rider. It was, indeed, his daring horsemanship upon

on the particular occasion, when he had outstripped a whole field, but had procured him the honour of an invitation to Rookwood. Who he was, or whence he came, was a question not easily answered—Jack, himself, evading all solution to the inquiry. Sir Piers never troubled his head about the matter: he was a “d—d good fellow—rode devilish well;” that was enough for him. Nobody else knew anything about him, save that he was a capital judge of horse-flesh, kept a famous black mare, and attended every hunt in the county—that he could sing a good song, was a choice companion, and could drink three bottles without feeling the worse for them.

Sensible of the indecorum that might attach to his appearance, Doctor Small had hastily laid down his pipe, and arranged his wig; but when he saw who was the intruder, with a grunt of defiance, he resumed his occupation, without returning the bow of the latter, or bestowing further notice upon him. Nothing discomposed at the churchman’s displeasure, the new comer greeted Titus cordially, and carelessly saluting Mr. Costes, threw himself into a chair. He next filled a tumbler of claret, which he drained at a draught.

“Have you ridden far, Jack;” asked Titus, noticing the dusty state of Palmer’s azure attire.

“Some dozen miles,” replied Palmer; “and that, on such an afternoon as the present, makes one feel thirstyish. I’m as dry as a sand-bed. Famous wine this—beautiful tippie—better than all your red fustian. Ah, how the old squire used to tuck it in! Well, that’s all over—a glass like this might do him good where he’s gone to! I’m afraid I’m intruding; but the fact is, I wanted a little information about the order of the funeral, and missing you below, came hither in search of you. You’re to be chief mourner, I suppose—rehearsing your part, eh?”

“Come come, Jack, no joking; the subject’s too serious. I am to be chief mourner—and I expect you to be a mourner—and everybody else to be mourners. We must all mourn at the proper time—there’ll be a power of people at the church.”

“There *are* a power of people here already,” returned Jack, “if they all attend.”

“And they *all will* attend—or what is the aiting and drinking to go for? I shan’t leave a sowl in the house.”

“Excepting one,” said Jack, silyly. “*She* won’t attend, I think.”

“Ay, excepting one—she and her maid—all the rest go with me, and form part of the procession—you go too.”

“Of course, what time do you start?”

“Midnight, precisely. As the clock strikes, we set out—all in a line, and a long line we’ll be. I’m waiting for that *sold* coffin-faced rascal, Peter Bradley, to arrange the order.”

"How long will all occupy, think you?" asked Jack.

"That I can't say," returned Titus; possibly an hour, more or less—but we shall start to the minute—that is, if we can all get together, so don't be out of the way. And hark ye, Jack, you must contrive to change your toggery—that coat won't do."

"Never fear that," replied Palmer, "but who were those in the carriages?"

"Is it the last carriage you mane!—they're squire Forester and his sons—they're dining with the other gentlefolk, in the great room up stairs, to be out of the way. Oh, we'll have a grand berrin, never fear—and by the powers I must be looking after it."

"Stay a minute," said Jack, "let's have a cool bottle first; they're all taking care of themselves below, and Peter Bradley has not made his appearance, so you need be in no hurry. I'll go with you presently—shall I ring for the claret?"

"By all means," replied Titus.

Jack accordingly arose, and a butler answering the summons, the wine was ordered and brought.

"You heard of the affray, last night, I suppose?" said Jack, renewing the conversation.

"With the poachers!—to be sure I did.—Wasn't I called in to examine Hugh Badger's wounds, the first thing this morning—and a deep cut there was, just over the eye, besides other bruises."

"Is the wound dangerous?" inquired Palmer.

"Not exactly mortal, if you mean that," replied the Irishman; "dangerous certainly."

"Humph!" exclaimed Jack, "they'd a pretty hardish bout of it, I understand. Anything been heard of the body?"

"What body?" inquired Small, who was half dozing.

"The body of the drowned poacher," replied Jack; "they were off to search for it this morning."

"Found the body!" exclaimed Titus, "Ha, ha!—I can't help laughing, for the life and soul of me—a capital trick he played 'em—capital—ha, ha! What do you think the fellow did? Ha, ha!—after leading 'em the devil's dance, all round the park, killing a hound as savage as a wolf, and breaking Hugh Badger's head, which is as hard and thick as a butcher's block, what does the fellow do but dive into a pool, with a great rock hanging over it, and make his way to the other side, through a subterranean pass, which nobody knew anything about, till they came to drag for the body, thinking him snugly drowned all the while—ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorused Jack; "Bravo, he's a lad of the right sort—a knowing cove.—Ha, ha!"

"He! who?" inquired the attorney.

"Why, the poacher, to be sure," replied Jack; "who else were we talking about?"

"Beg pardon," returned Coates; "only thought you might have heard some intelligence. We've got an eye upon him—we know who it was."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Jack, "and who was it?"

"A fellow, known by the name of Luke Bradley."

"The devil!" cried Titus, "you don't say it was he?—Murder in Irish! that bates everything—why he was Sir Piers's ——"

"Natural son," replied the attorney; "he has not been heard of for some time—shocking incorrigible rascal—impossible to do anything with him."

"Ah, indeed!" said Jack; "I've heard Sir Piers speak of the lad—and, by his account, he's as fine a fellow as ever crossed colt's back—only a little wildish and unreasonable, as the best of us may be—wants breaking, that's all—your wildest colt ever makes the best horse, and so would he. To speak the truth I'm glad he escaped."

"So am I," rejoined Titus; "for, in the first place, I've a foolish partiality for poachers, and am sorry when any of 'em come to hurt; and, in the second, I'd be mighty displeased if any ill had happened to one of Sir Piers' flesh and blood, as this young chap appears to be."

"Appears to be!" repeated Palmer; "there's no *appearing* in the case, I take it. This Bradley's an undoubted off-shot of the old squire. His mother was a servant-maid at the Hall, I rather think; you, Sir, perhaps, can inform us," added he turning to Coates.

"She was something better than a mere servant," replied the attorney. "I remember her quite well, though I was but a boy then—a lovely creature, and so taking, I don't wonder at Sir Piers's fancy being smitten with her. He was mad after the women in those days, and pretty Sue Bradley, above all others. She lived with him quite like his lady."

"So I've heard," returned Jack. "She lived with him till her death; and—let me see, wasn't there something rather odd in the way in which she died, rather suddenish and unexpected—a noise made at the time, eh?"

"Not that I ever heard," replied Coates, shaking his head, and seemingly afflicted with an instantaneous ignorance; while Titus affected not to hear the remark, but occupied himself with his wine-glass. The vicar snored audibly. "I was too young, then, to pay any attention to idle rumours," continued Coates. "It's a long time ago. May I ask the reason of your inquiry?"

"Nothing farther than simple curiosity," replied Jack, enjoying the consternation of his companions. "It is, as you say, a long while since; but it's singular, how that sort of thing

is remembered. One would think people had something else to do than talk of one's private affairs for ever: for my part, I despise such tattle; but there *are* persons in the neighbourhood, who still say it was an awkward business. Amongst others, I've heard that this very Luke Bradley talks in pretty plain terms about it."

"Does he, indeed!" said Mr. Coates. "So much the worse for him, that's all. Let me once lay hands upon him, and I'll warrant me I'll put a gag on his mouth, shall spoil his talking in future."

"That's precisely the point I want you to arrive at," replied Jack; "and I advise you by all means to accomplish that, for the sake of the family. Nobody likes his friends to be talked about; so I'd settle the matter amicably, were I you. Just let the fellow go his way, he won't return here again in a hurry, I'll be bound; as to clapping him in quod, he might prattle—might turn stag."

"Turn stag!" replied Coates, "what the deuce is that? in my opinion, he has 'turned stag' already; at all events, he'll pay *deer* for his night's sport, you may depend upon it. What does it signify what he says? Let me lay hands upon him, that's all."

"Well, well," said Jack, "no offence; I meant but to offer a suggestion. I thought the family,—young Sir Ranulph, I mean, mightn't like the story to be revived; as to Lady Rookwood, she don't, I suppose, care much about these things! indeed, if I've been rightly informed, she bears this youngster: no particular good-will, to begin with, and has tried hard to get him out of the country; but, as you say, what does it signify what he says, he can *only* talk; Sir Piers is dead and gone."

"Humph!" muttered Coates.

"But it does seem a little hardish, that a lad should swing for killing a bit of venison in his own father's park," continued Jack.

"Which he'd a *nat'ral* right to do," added Titus.

"He'd no natural right to bruise, violently assault, and endanger the life of his father's, or any body else's gamekeeper," said Coates, "I tell you, Sir, he's committed a capital offence, and if he's taken —"

"No chance of that, I hope," interrupted Jack.

"That's a wish I can't help wishing myself," said Titus; "these poachers are fine boys, when all's said and done."

"The finest of all boys," exclaimed Jack, with a sort of enthusiasm, communicated, perhaps, by his love of anything connected with sport, "are those birds of the night, and men of the moon, whom we call, most unjustly, poachers. They are, after all, only *professional sportsmen*, making a business of what we make a pleasure; a nightly pursuit of what is to us a daily relaxation; there's the main distinction. As to the rest

n idea; they merely thin an over-stocked park, as *you* reduce a plethoric patient, Doctor; or as *you* would moneyed client, if you got him into chancery, Mister . . . And then how much more scientifically, and systematically they set to work, than we amateurs do; how noise-ey bag a hare, smoke a pheasant, or knock a buck with an air-gun; how independent are they of any licence, out of a good eye and a swift pair of legs; how unnecessary to ask permission of Mr. So and So's grounds, or Lord That's preserves; they are free of every cover, and not to any alteration in the Game Laws. I've some . . . when everything else fails, of taking to poaching. In my opinion, a poacher's a highly respectable character. What say you, Mr. Coates?"—turning very gravely gentleman.

respectable character!" echoed Coates; "such a question deserves a serious answer. Perhaps you will next say that a highwayman is a gentleman."

"It undoubtedly," replied Palmer, in the same grave tone, "might have passed for banter, had Jack ever bantered; but I intend to maintain and prove it. I don't see how he can be other than what he is as necessary for a man to be a gentleman before he is a highwayman, as it is for a doctor to have his diploma, or a man to carry his certificate. Some of the finest gentlemen of the age, as Captains Lovelace, Hind, Hannum, and Dudley, have been eminent on the road, and they set the fashion. Ever since that time, a real highwayman would consider himself disgraced, if he did not conduct himself in every way like a gentleman. Now, there are pretenders in this line, as in everything else, but these are only exceptions, and prove the rule. What are the distinguishing characteristics of a fine gentleman? perfect knowledge of the world—perfect independence of character—in society—command of cash—and inordinate success with the women—you grant all these premises; first, then, of a highwayman's business to be thoroughly acquainted with the world—he is the easiest and pleasantest fellow. Then whose inclinations are so uncontrolled as the man's, so long as the mopusses last? who produces so much effect by so few words?—'Stand and deliver,' is sure to attract attention—every one is so struck by an address so well delivered. As to money, he appropriates a purse of a hundred pounds as easily as you would the same sum from the faro table, wherein lies the difference? only in the name of the game, both are a species of hazard. Who so little need of a license as he? all he has to apprehend, is a check—all he has to do is to pull the trigger. As to the women, they doat upon him—your red-coated soldier is successful. Look at a highwayman mounted on his flying steed, with his pistols in his belt, and his cutlass by his side—what can be a more gal-

lant sight ! the clattering of a horse's heels is like music to ear—he is in full quest—he shouts to the fugitive horseman stay—the other flies all the faster—what hunt can be half exciting as that ! Suppose he overtakes his prey, which to one he will, how readily his summons to deliver is attended to—how satisfactory is the appropriation of a lusty purse to a corpulent pocket-book—getting the brush is nothing to it. He tranquilly he departs, takes off his hat to his accommodated acquaintance, wishes him a pleasant journey, and disappears across the heath. England, Sir, has reason to be proud of her highwaymen ; they are peculiar to her clime, and are much before the cut-throat brigand of Italy—the assassin of Spain, or the dastard cut-purse of France, as sailors are before all the rest of the world. The day will come, I hope, when we shall degenerate into the footpad, lose our *Night Errantry* ! Even the French borrow from us they have only one highwayman of eminence, and he learned and practised his art in England.”

“ And who was he, may I ask ? ” said Coates.

“ Claud du Val,” replied Jack ; “ and, though a Frenchman he was a deuced fine fellow in his day—quite a tip top marionette—he could skip and twirl like a figurant, warble like an opera singer, and play the flageolet better than any man of day—he always carried a pipe in his pocket along with snappers. And then his toggery—it was quite beautiful to how smartly he was rigged out, all velvet and lace ; and even with his vizard on his face, the ladies used to cry out to him. Then he took a purse with the air and grace of a receiver-General—all the women adored him—and that, by their pretty faces, was the best proof of his gentility—I wish he'd not been a Mounseer. The women never mistake—they can always discover the true gentleman—and they were all every degree, from the countess to the kitchen-maid, over him and ears in love with him.”

“ Very fine, indeed,” cried Titus ; “ but your English highwaymen are nothing at all, compared with our Tories* and Rapparees—nothing at all—they were the real gentlemen—they were the boys to cut a throat easily.”

“ Cut a throat ! pshaw ! ” said Jack, in disgust. “ As a gentleman I speak of never maltreated any one, except in defence.”

* The word Tory, as here applied, must not be confounded with the term of party distinction now in general use in the political world. It simply means a thief on a grand scale, something more than “ a snapper up of unconsidered trifles,” or petty larceny rapine. We have classical authority for this—“ *Tory*—an advocate for absolute monarchy, also an Irish vagabond, robber, or rapparee.” *GROSE'S DICTIONARY.*

"May be not," replied Titus; "I'll not dispute the pint. But these Rapparees were true brothers of the blade, and gentlemen every inch. There was Redmond O'Hanlon, as great a man in his way as your famous outlaw Robin Hood, that we read of in the ballads—a generous robber, taking from the rich and giving to the poor, and that's the kind of thief that I like. I never read of Robin Hood and Little John, and Maid Marian, without my heart throbbing within my bosom, and the blood dancing in my veins, to be in the green-wood along with them. Just such another as bold Robin Hood was Redmond O'Hanlon. Ooh, many's the notable feat he performed.—I'll just tell you one story that's tould about him, just to show the daring audacity of the fellow. But in the meanwhile don't let's forget the bottle—talking's dry work—here's our absent friends!" winking at the somnolent Small.

"Well, you must know," continued Titus, "that Redmond had arrived at such an elevation, the Tories being in power then, and his having charge of the Administration, being a sort of First Lord of the Treasury, that he elected himself Captain-General of all the Rapparees, and would allow no one to take a purse, or make free with a pocket-book, without a special permission from himself, which shows he had instinctive sense of his political importance. One day, as the great Captain was riding quietly along the road between Newry and Armagh, he chanced to fall in with a pedlar, who was making as much halabaloo and lamentation, as if he'd been knocked off the civil list. 'Hello, my man,' says Captain O'Hanlon, 'what ails you, what makes you cry out in that way?'—'Oh,' answers the pedlar, 'I'm kilt entirely. I've been robbed of above five pounds in kinnis, which was all I had, as I hope for salvation; and that wouldn't satisfy the blackguard neither, for he took away my pack; and because I strove to hould it, he knock'd me down, and kicked me worse than a hound.'—'And who was it rob'd you?' ask'd the Captain. 'That infernal rascal, and thief of the world, Redmond O'Hanlon,' answered the pedlar. 'You dog,' cried Redmond, in a terrible passion, delivering him at the same time a knock on the side of the head with his whip-handle, 'how dare you tell me a lie like that, to my face. By the mother that bore me, I've half a mind to shoot you on the spot, and but for settling this business I'd do it. I am Redmond O'Hanlon; nobody shall usurp my title with impunity. Show me which way the fellow went, and I'll soon convince you what it is to offend a Tory leader.' The pedlar pointed out the road, upon which he whistled to the members of his cabinet, who were a little in the rear, and they set off in pursuit. The fellow was soon overtaken, with the pack on his back, and Redmond immediately compelled a restitution of the property. 'And now, my friend,' said he, to the terrified robber, 'as I don't remember having given you any authority to make use of

my name, or indeed any licence for exaction at all, I shall think it my duty to make an example of you. You, pedlar, will sign an obligation to prosecute this fellow next assizes, on pain of having both your ears cropp'd off—a penalty which, if you neglect the bond, I will not fail to enforce. You, Sir, I shall merely commit to jail.' And he forthwith drew up a mittimus from himself, Redmond O'Hanlon, *in loco*, one of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace, as follows:—'I herewith send you the body of Dennis O'Brien, who was this day brought before me and examined, for robbing Patrick O'Driscoll on the King's high road, requiring you to hold him in safe custody till the next General Assize to be held for the County; and for so doing this shall be your sufficient warrant.' And this he signed with his own hand, and sent him off with his own troop to the jail at Armagh."

"Bravissimo!" cried Palmer, "and was the fellow tried?"

"Yes, and convicted moreover," replied Titus, "and plenty of fun there was in court, as you may suppose, amongst the big *Wigs*, at this daring proceeding of the great Tory."

"The Whigs were in power at last, I suspect?" said Coster. "Was the great Captain still more exalted?"

"As high as Haman," answered Titus; "more's the pity—I'm no enemy to the Tories, and regret the great Captain."

"So do I," said Jack, who had listened with great satisfaction to the exploit. "Suppose we toast him—To the memory of Captain O'Hanlon"—filling his glass.

"I must take the liberty of refusing that toast," said the Attorney; "it shall never be said that I, a Clerk of the Peace—"

"Tush, man," said Jack, "sit down, and keep quiet; we know you're amongst the *Opposition*—drink *what* you like, and as you like, only let's have another story, if Titus have any more to tell. He tops the traveller in prime twig."

"Here's to the blessed memory of Redmond O'Hanlon," cried Titus, draining a bumper. "And as to the story, did you ever hear mention made of one Captain Power. He was another brave boy, and quite the gentleman, and as fond of the girls as ever was Du Val. Nicely he turned the tables on an ensign of musketeers, that came out from Cork to seize him. You shall hear how it happened."

"This ensign had received intelligence that Power had taken up his quarters at a small inn, on the road leading from Kilworth, and being anxious to finger the reward offered for his apprehension, set out with a file of men. It was growing dusk when they reached the inn, and there, *shure* enough, was Power drinking, for they saw him through a window, with his bottle before him, lighting his pipe, quite comfortable. 'Ha—ha!'—thinks the Ensign, 'my boy, I have you safe enough, now; but knowing his man, and expecting a devil of a resistance; if he attempted to lay hands on the captain by force, he determined to resort to stratagem; so entering the house, just as if

he were on a recruiting party, he, the Ensign, calls loudly for whisky for his men, and a bottle of port for himself, and marches into the room where Power was sitting, who got up to receive him very politely. Now, whether the Captain suspected his intentions or not I can't say; at all events, he didn't let the Ensign perceive it; but took his wine as pleasantly as we are doing now, with no suspicion of anything in our heads—and no thought of any mischief brewing."

"Exactly," said Jack; "I understand."

"Well, the bottle was drawing to a close, and Power rose up, to call for another, when the Ensign, thinking it time, starts to his feet, presents a pistol to his head, and commands him to surrender. 'With all the pleasure in life,' replied the Captain, 'that is, when you can take me; and knocking up the Ensign's arm, so that he could not even pull his trigger, he threw himself upon him, effectually preventing his crying out, by stuffing his coat-pocket into his mouth; he then very coolly proceeded to divest the Ensign of his grand uniform, and taking his purse and sword, and military cloak, tied him hand and foot, and telling him he hoped he was satisfied with his *reward*, walked out of the room, locking the door on the other side unconcernedly after him, and putting the key in his pocket. The men, who were busy with their whisky-toddy, seeing their officer, as they thought, come out and motion them to keep still, never stirred a peg—but suffered Power to get clear away, without so much as a question."

"Capital," cried Jack.

"Ah," said Titus, "many's the tale I could tell, if I'd time, about these Rapparees. There *was* strong Jack Macpherson, who could pull a man off his horse single-handed, and Billy Macguire, Irish Teague, as he was called, and Dick Balf, and the devil knows how many others; and there is Paul Lidy, whose name's quite up in the country now—a famous thief, horse-stealer, and horse-charmer."

"Horse-charmer!" repeated Palmer, "what sort of craft may that be?"

"I'll tell you," replied Titus; "Cahir na Cappul, one of the Rapparees, is said to have received a potent charm from a witch, to enable him to decoy and entrap any horse he thought proper; and a right serviceable piece of enchantment he found it, though not quite so useful to a Rapparee as that of Billy Delaney, who got the same ould woman to rub his neck with an *intment*, so that no hemp could hang him, which last has proved true, sure enough! for after he'd been tied up for a matter of an hour, and cut down, he was brought to life again without difficulty.* But to return to Cahir na Cappul. I was

* Delaney's own account somewhat differs from that in the text; he does not appear to attribute his preservation to anything like witchcraft. "An acquaintance of mine," says he, "who had been

once myself an eye-witness to his tricks, although I wasn't aware it was he himself at the time. One evening I'd been to see a friend in a distant part of the country, and was returning by some fields skirting a great boggy piece of ground that lies in those parts, when what should I see but a man driving a pack of horses into a corner of the field, which he managed so cleverly that I stopped to look at him. Not a notion had I that he was a Rapparee; in fact, I took him for the owner of the field. As to the horses, they were young unbroken things, as wild and as restive as could be: but somehow or other, by screaming and shouting, he got 'em all into a corner. Then singling out the finest and freshest (and a beauty it was to be *shure*), he seized by the near fore leg, and held him fast while he threw a bit of rope round his neck, vaulting on to his back as if he'd been a tame pony in a circus. Thinks I to myself, when I saw how the *coul* began to *fling*,—You'll not be sorry to change your seat, my friend. No such idea entered his head; for however much the *coul* kicked, and capered, and *rared*, there sat the man, and only laughed, and encouraged him. At last the horse *rared* boult upright, with his legs in the air; but still there the rider stuck, glued to his back, as if he'd been the man half of the Centaur in the sign at Ballynacrag. Finding resistance useless, and the position by no means agreeable, down came the *coul*, and with that my gentleman began to tickle his sides with his fingers, and away they set dashing and splashing over bog and quagmire—floundering and plunging—so that I thought if the Headless Horseman himself had been the rider, he must have been hard put to it. I was wrong again, for they were soon out of sight; and I found, on inquiry, afterwards, that it was no other than Cahir na Cappul, himself, I had seen."

"Is that all the charm?" cried Jack. "The secret of that, Mr. Tyrconnel, lies in a nutshell—*pluck!*—that's all that's required. I'll engage to do the same thing any day in the year, and ask no withcraft to aid me to keep my seat."

"Cahir can do other things beside ride," said Titus, solicitous for the glory of his country. "Not long since he'd a nar-

instructed in the art of surgery at Paris, came to see me in jail a few days before my trial at Naas; he prepared something for me, which I was to keep in my mouth while I hung, if possible, and said it would be a means of preserving my life. This made me somewhat careless of preparing for death, for I was intent upon observing his directions. I turned from the ladder as easily as I could, and for the space of a minute or two was very sensible of pain, and could feel something now and then under my feet, till immediately I thought all things before me were turned into a red flame, which presently seemed blue, till at last it vanished quite."—*History of the Rapparees.*

now escape of being taken on the banks of the Barrow, when he was pursued by a large party of armed men on both sides of the river. Down rushed Cahir to the water-side, and dash'd headlong into the stream, swimming away for his life. A gun was fired—down he dives, like a coot—up again—another—and then a volley, followed by a long dive—so long, that every body thought he was done for entirely—when up pops a black head, far down the stream. He was now in a swift current, and put out all his strength, darting away like an arrow from a bow. The water in every direction was spotted by balls, but never a one seemed to touch him; and though every *soul* of 'em ran as fast as legs can carry him, yet aided by the swift stream, Cahir na Cappul outstripped them all."

"Well," said Coates, "we've had enough about the Irish highwaymen, in all conscience: but there's one on our own side of the channel that makes quite as much noise."

"Who's that?" asked Jack.

"Dick Turpin," replied the Attorney; "he seems to me quite as worthy of mention as any of the hinds, the Du Vals, or the Rapparees, you have either of you enumerated."

"I did not think of him," replied Palmer, smiling; "though if I had, he scarcely deserves to be ranked with those great men."

"Turpin!" cried Titus; "they tell me he keeps the best nag in the United Kingdom, and can ride faster and farther in a day than any other man."

"So I've heard," said Palmer; "I should like to try a run with him. I warrant me, I'd not be far behind that same Dick."

"I should like to get a peep at Turpin," said Titus.

"So should I," added Coates.

"You may both of you be gratified, gentlemen," said Palmer.

"Talking of Dick Turpin, they say, is like talking of the devil, he's at your elbow ere the word's out of your mouth. He may be within hearing, at this moment, for anything we know to the contrary."

"Faith then," replied Titus, "he must lie, like a rat, in the wainscoat, for I don't know where else he could hide."

"Were he there," returned Jack, laughing, "you might grab him, like Du Val at the '*Hole-in-the-wall*.'"

"I wish they could grab him, as you call it, with all my heart," said the Attorney; "and they might do so, if they were to set the right way to work. I've a plan for seizing him, that could not fail; I've a noose in embryo: only let me get a glimpse of him, that's all. You shall see how I'll dispose of him."

"Well, Sir, we *shall* see," observed Palmer; "and for your own sake, I wish you may never be nearer to him than you are at this moment. With his friends, they say Dick Turpin

can be as gentle as a lamb; with his foes, especially with a limb of the law like yourself, he's been found but an ugly customer. I once saw him at Newmarket, where he was collared by two constable calls, one on each side. Shaking off one, and dealing the other a blow in the face with his heavy-handled whip, he stuck spurs into his horse, and though the whole field gave chase, he distanced them all, easily."

"And how came you not to try your pace with him, if you were there, as you boasted just now?" asked Coates.

"So I did, and stuck closer to him than any one else. We were neck and neck. I was the only person who could have delivered him to the hands of justice, if I'd felt inclined."

"I wish I'd a similar opportunity," said Coates: "it should be neck or nothing. Either he or I should reach the scragging post first. I'd take him, dead or alive."

"You take him!" cried Jack, with a sneer.

"I'd engage to do it," replied Coates. "I'll bet a hundred guineas I take him, if I ever have the same chance."

"Done!" exclaimed Jack, rapping the table at the same time, so that the glasses danced upon it.

"That's right," cried Titus. "I'll go your halves."

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Small, awakened from his doze.

"Only a trifling bet about a highwayman," replied Titus.

"A highwayman!" echoed Small. "There are none in the house, I hope."

"I hope not," answered Coates. "But these gentlemen seem to have a remarkable predilection for discussing the lives of those depredators. They have sung the praises of all sorts of rogues and rascals for the last half-hour. All the thieves of modern days have been brought under review."

Further speech was cut short, by the sudden opening of the door, followed by the abrupt entrance of a tall, slender young man, who hastily advanced towards the table, around which the company were seated. He excited the utmost astonishment in the whole group, curiosity was exhibited in every countenance—the magnum remained poised midway in the hand of Palmer—Doctor Small scorched his thumb in the bowl of his pipe; and Mr. Coates was almost choked, by swallowing an inordinate whiff of vapour.

"Young Sir Ranulph!" ejaculated the latter, so soon as the syncope would permit him.

"Sir Ranulph here?" echoed Palmer.

"Good God!" exclaimed Small.

"The devil!" cried Titus, with a start; "This is more than I expected."

"Gentlemen," said Ranulph, "do not let my unexpected arrival here discompose you. Doctor Small, you will excuse the manner of my greeting; and you, Mr. Coates. One of the

party, I believe, was my father's medical attendant, a Mr. Tyrconnel."

"I, Sir, had that honour," replied Titus, bowing profoundly.

"When, and at what hour, did he die?" demanded Ranulph.

"Your worthy father," answered Titus, again bowing, "departed this life on Thursday last."

"The hour!—the precise minute?" asked Ranulph, eagerly.

"Faith, Sir Ranulph," replied Titus, "as nearly as I can recollect, it might be a few minutes before midnight."

"The very hour!" exclaimed Ranulph, striding towards the window. His steps were arrested, as his eyes fell upon the attire of his father, which, as we have before noticed, hung at that end of the room. A slight shudder passed over his frame. There was a momentary pause, during which Ranulph continued gazing intently at the apparel. "The very dress too!" muttered he; then, turning to the assembly, who were watching his movements with surprise, he requested them to resume their seats. Palmer and the attorney complied instantly, but Doctor Small advanced toward him, and with great kindness of manner, taking hold of Ranulph's hand, drew him into a corner of the room.

"Your sudden return has indeed surprised me—nor can I conceive how intelligence of your father's demise could possibly have reached you in time sufficient to have enabled you to arrive here. Nevertheless, your presence will be most welcome to your parent (would I could say in affliction)—as well as desirable on all other accounts. Your attendance at the funeral—"

"Which takes place to-night."

"At the mid hour—a strange custom, Sir Ranulph?" said Small.

"Strange, indeed!" said Ranulph, musingly.

"Very strange!" reiterated Small, "and might be resisted. I should never dream of complying with such conditions."

"Comply with what conditions?" exclaimed Ranulph, starting. "Have I not done his bidding?"

"Whose bidding, my good young friend?" asked Small, surprised at the question.

"Nay, there is some mistake," replied Ranulph, recovering his composure, and smiling faintly. "I am jaded with my journey. An hour's rest will enable me to go through this melancholy ceremony. Where is my mother?"

"Lady Rookwood is, I believe, in her own room," replied Titus. "She desired she might not be disturbed—and left the whole management of the solemnity to me—of course not anticipating your return, Sir Ranulph—and I trust the arrangements which I have made will meet with your satisfaction. I have endeavoured, to the best of my power, to maintain the respecta-

bility of the family, by doing the thing in the most liberal manner, and in such a way as I knew it would best have pleased my respected friend had he been alive to witness it. Heaven rest him! There is another thing, also, I may as well mention, and I hope the allusion to it will not be distressing to your feelings, Sir Ranulph. According to Sir Pier's directions, his body has been embalmed under my own immediate superintendence; and though I say it, who should not say it, he looks, in consequence as beautiful as the day he was born. The corpse is now lying in state, with the room lighted up; but, at Lady Rookwood's particular request, I have ordered every soul in the house to be shut out of the room until ten o'clock, as her Ladyship has signified her desire to view the remains alone. An order, I assure you, Sir Ranulph, I had some difficulty in enforcing, the tenantry being mighty anxious to see the last of their master. Heaven rest him, I say."

"I will not disturb my mother, at present"—returned the young man; upon whom this piece of information appeared to produce a very painful effect; "nor would I have her know of my arrival. Doctor, I have something for your private ear," addressing Small. "Gentlemen, will you spare us the room for a few minutes?"

"By my conscience," said Tyrconnel to Jack Palmer, as they were going forth, "a mighty fine boy he is—and a chip of the old block—he'll be as good a fellow as his father."

"No doubt," replied Palmer, shutting the door. "But what the devil brought him back, just at this moment?"

CHAPTER VII.

Fer. Yes, Francisco,
He hath left his curse upon me.

Fran. How!

Fer. His curse! dost comprehend what that word carries,
Shot from a father's angry breath? Unless,
I tear poor Felisarda from my heart,
He hath pronounced me heir to all his curses.

THE BROTHERS.—SHIRLEY.

"THERE is nothing, I trust, my dear young friend and quondam pupil," said Dr. Small, as the door was closed, "that weighs upon your mind, beyond the sorrow naturally incident to an affliction, severe as the present. Forgive my apprehensions, if I am wrong. You know the affectionate interest I have ever

felt for you—an interest, which I assure you, is nowise diminished, and which will excuse my urging you to unburthen your mind to me; assuring yourself, whatever may be your disclosure, of my sincere sympathy and commiseration. I may be better able to advise with you, should counsel be necessary, than others, from my knowledge of your character and temperament. I would not anticipate evil, and am perhaps, unnecessarily apprehensive: but I own, I am startled at the incoherence of your expressions, coupled with your sudden and almost mysterious appearance at this distressing conjuncture. Tell me then; has your return been the result of mere accident? is it to be considered one of those singular circumstances which almost looks like fate, and baffles our comprehension? or were you nearer home than we expected, and received the news of your father's demise through any channel unknown by us? Satisfy my curiosity, I pray you, upon this point?"

"Your curiosity, my dear sir," replied Ranulph, gravely and sadly, "will not be decreased, when I tell you, that my return has neither been the work of chance (for I came, fully anticipating the dread event, which I find realized), nor has it been occasioned by any intelligence derived from yourself, or elsewhere. It was only indeed at Rookwood that I received full confirmation of my fears. I had another, a more terrible summons to return."

"What summons? you perplex me!" exclaimed Small.

"I am myself perplexed—sorely perplexed," returned Ranulph. "I have much to tell—much to relate; but, I pray you, bear with me to the end. I have that on my mind which, like guilt, must be revealed. It will out."

"Speak, then, fearlessly to me," said Small, affectionately pressing Ranulph's hand. "I am all impatience for your relation, and will offer no further interruption to it."

"It will be necessary," began Ranulph, "to preface my narrative by some slight allusion to certain painful events (and yet I know not why I should call them *painful*, excepting in their consequences), which influenced my conduct in my final interview between my father and myself—an interview which occasioned my departure for the continent—and which was of a character so dreadful, that I would not even revert to it, were it not a necessary preliminary to the circumstance which I am about to detail. You remember, no doubt, how hastily my journey was resolved upon. My ostensible motive for undertaking it you may also have heard; not so, I am sure, the real one. To you, who knew my father so well, and were aware of the tenor of his life, I need not particularize the terms upon which we lived together; you could not have been ignorant of them. My affection for him was constant and consistent. There was no corresponding sympathy on his part; he never loved me as his son, or, if he did, his love for me was more fickle, more

variable, more capricious, than the lightest woman's regards. Mortified and distressed at having my affections so frequently thrown back upon themselves, I contrived to regulate and control my own feelings, by drawing out for myself a code of conduct, so nice and guarded, that no quarrel of consequence could arise between us; and, by yielding implicitly in everything to his wishes, I insensibly acquired an ascendancy over him, which, without deviating from the strict line of filial duty, was as advantageous in its effects to himself as to me. But this system could not hold good in every case, as you will perceive.

"When I left Oxford, I passed a few weeks alone, in London. A college friend, whom I accidentally met, introduced me, during a promenade in St. James's Park, to some acquaintance of his own, who were taking an airing in the Mall at the same time;—a family whose name was Mowbray, consisting of a widow-lady, her son, and daughter. This introduction was made in compliance with my own request. I had been struck by the singular beauty of the younger lady, whose countenance had a peculiar and inexpressible charm to me, from its marked resemblance to the portrait of the lady Eleanor Rookwood, whose charms, and whose unhappy fate, I have so often dwelt upon, and deplored. The picture is there," pointing to it, "and how like, how wonderfully like, it is. How often have I gazed at it with a fervour like that of a devotee before some 'sainted semblance,' little dreaming of those after-emotions of which it should be the germ! Look at it, and you have the fair creature I speak of before you; the colour of the hair—the tenderness of the eyes. No—the expression is not so sad, except when—but no matter; I recognized her features at once.

"It struck me, that upon the mention of my name, the party had betrayed some surprise, especially the elder lady. For my own part, I was so attracted by the beauty of the daughter, the effect of which upon me, seemed rather the fulfilment of a predestined event, originating in the strange fascination which the family portrait had wrought in my heart, than the operation of what is called, 'love at first sight,' that I was insensible to the agitation of the mother. In vain I endeavoured to rally myself; my efforts at conversation were fruitless; I could not talk—all I could do, was silently to yield to the soft witchery of those tender eyes, my admiration increasing each instant that I gazed upon them.

"I accompanied them home. Attracted as by some irresistible spell, I could not tear myself away; so that, although I fancied I could perceive symptoms of displeasure in the looks of both the mother and the son, yet regardless of consequences, I ventured, uninvited, to enter the house. In order to shake off the restraint which I found my society imposed, I found it absolutely necessary to divest myself of bashfulness, and to exert

such conversational powers as I possessed. I succeeded so well, that the discourse soon became lively and animated; and what chiefly delighted me was, that *she*, for whose sweet sake I had committed my present rudeness, became radiant with smiles. I had been all eagerness to seek for some explanation of the resemblance to which I have just alluded, and the fitting moment had, I conceived, arrived. I called attention to a peculiar expression in the features of Miss Mowbray, and then instance the likeness that subsisted between her and my ancestress. 'It is the more singular,' I said, turning to her mother, 'because there could have been no affinity, that I am aware of, between them, and yet the likeness is surprising.'—'It is not so singular as you imagine,' answered Mrs. Mowbray, 'there is affinity; that Lady Rookwood was my mother. Eleanor Mowbray *does* resemble her ill-fated ancestress.'

Words cannot paint my astonishment. I gazed at Mrs. Mowbray, considering whether I had not so shaped the sounds, as to suit my own quick and passionate conceptions. But no—I read in her calm, collected countenance—in the downcast glance, and sudden sadness of Eleanor, as well as in the changed and haughty demeanour of the brother, that I had heard her rightly. Eleanor Mowbray was my cousin—the descendant of that sainted woman, whose image I had almost worshipped.

"Recovering from my surprise, I addressed Mrs. Mowbray, endeavouring to excuse my ignorance of our relationship, on the plea that I had not been given to understand that such had been the name of the gentleman she had espoused. 'Nor was it,' answered she, 'the name he bore at Rookwood; circumstances forbade it then. How should you have known it? From the hour I quitted the house until this moment, excepting one interview with my—with Sir Reginald Rookwood—I have seen none of my family—have held no communication with them—my brothers have been strangers to me—the very name of Rookwood has been unheard, unknown; nor would you have been admitted here, had not accident occasioned it.' I ventured now to interrupt her, and to express a hope that she would suffer an acquaintance to be kept up, which had so fortunately commenced, and which might most probably bring about an entire reconciliation between the families. I was so earnest in my expostulations, my whole soul being in them, that she inclined a more friendly ear to me. Eleanor, too, smiled encouragement upon me. Love lent me eloquence; and at length, as a token of my success, and her own relenting, Mrs. Mowbray held forth her hand; I clasped it eagerly. It was the happiest moment of my life.

"'But, then, your father,' said Mrs. Mowbray, after a short space, 'what will he say to this?'

"'I hope, nay, I am sure, he will rejoice at it,' I answered;

but my heart smote me with a bitter presentiment, and I thought I saw a very slight tremor in Eleanor's countenance, so slight, indeed, as to be imperceptible to any other eye than that of a lover. 'At all events,' said I, 'I am a free agent.'

"'No,' replied Mrs. Mowbray, 'unless he is willing that the intimacy be renewed, and will himself make the advances, I will never acquiesce in it.'

"It was in vain I again urged all my former arguments; she was inflexible; and the utmost I could obtain from her, was permission to visit at her house daily during my brief continuance in town. To this she unwillingly consented; but my solicitation was backed by her son, Captain Mowbray, who now came forward in the most friendly manner, and urged his mother to accede to my wishes.

"You may suppose that I did not hesitate to avail myself of this permission. The next day found me there, and the next. I then learnt the history of the family. For many years they had dwelt in the south of France, where Mr. Mowbray had died. The son had visited England, entered the army, and risen to his present rank. Their fortune was slender, but sufficient. After having spent some years in active service, Captain Mowbray returned to his family, and brought them over with him to this country. They had resided in London then nearly two years.

"I will not trouble you with any lengthened description of Eleanor Mowbray. I hope, at some period or other, you may still be enabled to see her, and judge for yourself; for though adverse circumstances have hitherto conspired to separate us, the time for a renewal of our acquaintance is approaching, I trust, for I am not yet altogether without hope. But thus much, I must say, that her rare endowments of person were only equalled by the graces of her mind.

"Educated abroad, she had all the vivacity of our livelier neighbours, combined with every solid qualification, which we claim as more essentially our own. Her light and frolic manner was French, certainly; but her gentle, sincere heart was as surely English. The foreign accent that dwelt upon her tongue, communicated an inexpressible charm, even to the language which she spoke.

"I will not dwell too long upon this theme. I feel ashamed of my own prolixity. And yet I am sure you will pardon it! Ah! those bright, brief days! too quickly were they fled! I could expatiate upon each minute—recall each word—revive each look. It may not be—I must hasten on. Darker themes await me.

"My love made rapid progress. I became each hour more enamoured of my new-found cousin. My whole time was passed near her; indeed, I could scarcely exist, in absence from her side. Short, however, was destined to be my indulgence in

his blissful state. One happy week was its extent. I received a peremptory summons from my father to return home.

"Immediately upon commencing this acquaintance, I had written to my father, explaining every particular attending it. This I should have done of my own free will, but I was urged to it by Mrs. Mowbray. Unaccustomed to disguise, I had expatiated upon the beauty of Eleanor, and in such terms, I fear, that I excited some uneasiness in his breast. His letter was laconic. He made no allusion to the subject upon which I had expatiated when writing to him. He commanded me to return.

"The bitter hour was at hand. I could not hesitate to comply. Without my father's sanction, I was assured Mrs. Mowbray would not permit any continuance of my acquaintance. Of Eleanor's inclinations I fancied I had some assurance; but without her mother's consent, to whose will she was devoted, I felt, had I even been inclined to urge it, that my suit was hopeless. The letter which I had received from my father made me more than doubt, whether I should not find him utterly adverse to my wishes. Agonized, therefore, with a thousand apprehensions, I presented myself on the morn of my departure. It was then I made the declaration of my passion to Eleanor—it was then that every hope was confirmed, every apprehension realized. I received from her lips a confirmation of my fondest wishes; yet were those hopes blighted in the bud, when I heard, at the same time, that their consummation was dependant on the will of two others, whose assenting voices, she feared, could never be obtained. From Mrs. Mowbray I received a more decided reply. All her haughtiness was aroused. Her farewell words assured me, that it was indifferent to her, whether we met again as relatives or as strangers. Then was it that the native tenderness of Eleanor displayed itself, in an outburst of feeling peculiar to a heart keenly sympathetic as ~~her's~~. She saw my suffering—the reserve natural to her sex gave way—she flung herself into my arms—and so we parted.

"With a heavy foreboding, I returned to Rookwood, and, oppressed with the gloomiest anticipations, I endeavoured to prepare myself for the worst. I arrived. My reception was such as I had calculated upon; and, to increase my distress, my parents had been at variance. I will not pain you and myself with any recital of their disagreement. My mother had espoused my cause, chiefly, I fear, with the view of thwarting my poor father's inclinations. He was in a terrible mood, exasperated by the fiery stimulants he had swallowed, which had not, indeed, drowned his reason, but roused and inflamed every dormant emotion to violence. He was as one insane. It was evening when I arrived. I would willingly have postponed

the interview till the morrow. It could not be. He insisted upon seeing me.

"My mother was present. You know the restraint she usually had over my father, and how she maintained it. On this occasion, she had none. He questioned me as to every particular; probed my secret soul—dragged forth every latent feeling, and then thundered out his own determination that Eleanor never should be bride of mine; nor would he receive under his roof, her mother, the discountenanced daughter of his father. I endeavoured to remonstrate with him. He was deaf to my entreaties. My mother added sharp and stinging words to my expostulations. 'I had her consent,' she said; 'what more was needed? The lands were entailed. I should at no distant period be their master, and might then please myself.' This I mention, in order to give you my father's strange answer.

"'Have a care, madam,' replied he, 'and bridle your tongue; they *are* entailed 'tis true, but I need not ask *his* consent to cut off that entail. Let him dare to disobey me in this particular, and I will so divert the channel of my wealth, that no drop shall touch him. I will—but why threaten?—let him do it, and approve the consequences.'

"On the morrow I renewed my importunities, with no better success. We were alone.

"'Ranulph,' said he, 'you waste time, in seeking to change my resolution; it is unalterable. I have many motives which influence me: they are inexplicable, but imperative. Eleanor Mowbray never can be your's.' Forget her as speedily as may be, and I pledge myself, upon whomsoever else your choice may fix, I will offer no obstacle.'

"'But why,' exclaimed I, with vehemence, 'do you object to one whom you have never beheld? At least consent to see her.'

"'Never!' he replied. 'The tie is sundered, and cannot be re-united; my father bound me by an oath, never to meet in friendship with my sister. I will not break my vow. I will not violate its conditions, even in the second degree. We never can meet again. An idle prophecy, which I have heard, has said, "*that when a Rookwood shall marry a Rookwood, the end of the house draweth nigh.*" That I regard not. It may have no meaning, or it may have much. To me it imports nothing further, than that if you wed Eleanor, every acre I possess shall depart from you. And assure yourself this is no idle threat; I can, and will do it. My curse shall be your sole inheritance.'

"I could not avoid making some reply, representing to him how unjustifiable such a procedure was to me, in a case where the happiness of my life was at stake; and how inconsistent it was with the charitable precepts of our faith, to allow feelings

of resentment to influence his conduct. My remonstrances, as on the preceding meeting, were ineffectual. The more I spoke, the more intemperate he grew; I desisted, therefore; but not before he had ordered me to quit the house. I did not leave the neighbourhood, but saw him again on the same evening.

"Our last interview took place in the garden. I then told him that I had determined to go abroad for two years, at the expiration of which period I proposed returning to England; trusting that his resolution might then be changed, and that he would listen to my request, for the fulfilment of which I could never cease to hope. Time, I trusted, might befriend me. He approved of my plan of travelling, requesting me not to see Eleanor before I set out; adding in a melancholy tone,—'We may never meet again, Ranulph, in this life; in that case, farewell for ever. Indulge no vain hopes. Eleanor never can be yours, but upon one condition, and to that you would never consent!'—'Name it!' I cried; 'there is no condition I could not accede to.'—'Rash boy!' he replied; 'you know not what you say; that pledge you would never fulfil were I to propose it to you; but no—should I survive till your return, you shall know it then—and, now, farewell.'—'Speak now, I beseech you!' I exclaimed; anything, everything—what you will!—'Say no more,' replied he, walking towards the house; 'when you return we will renew this subject; farewell—perhaps for ever.' His words were prophetic—that parting *was* for ever. I remained in the garden till nightfall. I saw my mother, but *she* came not again. I quitted England, without beholding Eleanor."

"Did you not acquaint her, by letter, with what had occurred, and your consequent intentions?" inquired Small.

"I did," replied Ranulph: "but received no reply. My earliest inquiries will be directed to ascertain whether the family are still in London. It will be a question for our consideration, whether I am not justified in departing from my father's express wishes, or whether I should violate his commands in so doing."

"We will discuss that point hereafter," replied Small, adding, as he noticed the growing paleness of his companion—"You are too exhausted to proceed—you had better defer the remainder of your story to a future period."

"No," replied Ranulph, filling himself a glass of water, "I am exhausted, yet I cannot rest—my blood is in a fever, which nothing will allay. I shall feel more easy, when I have made the present communication. I am approaching the sequel of my narrative. You are now in possession of the story of my love—of the motive of my departure. You shall learn what was the motive of my return."

"I had wandered from city to city during my term of exile—consumed by hopeless passion—with little that could amuse

me, though surrounded by a thousand objects of interest to others, and only rendering life endurable by severest study, or most active exertion. My steps conducted me to Bourdeaux;—there I made a long halt, enchanted by the beauty of the neighbouring scenery. My fancy was smitten by the situation of a villa on the banks of the Garonne, within a few leagues of the city. It was an old château, with fine gardens bordering the blue waters of the river, and commanding a multitude of enchanting prospects. The house, which had in part gone to decay, was inhabited by an aged couple, who had formerly been servants to an English family, the members of which had thus provided for them on their return to their own country. I inquired the name. Conceive my astonishment, to find that this château had been the residence of the Mowbrays. The intelligence decided me at once—I took up my abode in the house; and a new and unexpected source of solace and delight was opened to me. I traced the paths *she* had traced—occupied the room *she* had occupied—tended the flowers *she* had tended; and, on the golden summer eves would watch the rapid waters, tinged with the glorious hues of sunset, sweeping past my feet, and think how *she* had watched them. Her presence so seemed to pervade the place. I was now comparatively happy, and, anxious to remain unmolested, I wrote home that I was leaving Bourdeaux for the Pyrennees, on my way to Spain.”

“That account arrived,” said Small.

“One night,” continued Ranulph, “’tis now the sixth since the occurrence I am about to relate, I was seated in a bower that overlooked the river. It had been a lovely evening—so lovely, that I lingered there, wrapt in the contemplation of its beauties. I watched each rosy tint reflected upon the surface of the rapid stream—now fading into yellow—now paling into white. I noted the mystic mingling of twilight with darkness—of night with day, till the bright current on a sudden became a black mass of waters. I could scarce discern a leaf—all was darkness—when lo! another change! The moon was up—a flood of light deluged all around—the stream was dancing again in reflected radiance, and I still lingering at its brink.

“I had been musing for some moments, with my head resting upon my hand, when, happening to raise my eyes, I beheld a figure immediately before me. I was astonished at the sight, for I had perceived no one approach—had heard no footstep advance towards me, and was satisfied that no one beside myself could be in the garden. The presence of the figure inspired me with an undefinable awe; and, I can scarce tell why, but a thrilling presentiment convinced me that it was a supernatural visitant. Without motion—without life—without substance, it seemed; yet still the outward character of life was there. I started to my feet. God! what did I behold! The face was turned to me—*my father’s face!* And what an

aspect—what a look! Time can never efface that terrible gesture: it is graven upon my memory—I cannot describe it. It was not anger—it was not pain: it was as if an eternity of woe were stamped upon its features. It was too dreadful to behold. I would fain have averted my gaze—my eyes were fascinated—fixed—I could not withdraw them from the ghastly countenance. I shrank from it, yet stirred not—I could not move a limb. Noiselessly gliding towards me, the apparition approached—I could not retreat—it stood obstinately beside me. I became like one half dead. The phantom shook its head with the deepest despair; and as the word ‘Return!’ sounded hollowly in my ears, it gradually melted from my view. I cannot tell how I recovered from the swoon into which I fell, but day-break saw me on my way to England. I am here. On that night—at that same hour, my father died.”

“It was, after all, then, a supernatural summons that you received?” said Small.

“Undoubtedly,” replied Ranulph.

“The coincidence, I own, is sufficiently curious,” returned Small, musingly; “and it is difficult to offer any satisfactory explanation of the delusion.”

“Delusion!” echoed Ranulph; “there was no delusion—the figure was as palpable as your own. Can I doubt, when I behold this result? Could any deceit have been practised upon me, at that distance?—the precise time, moreover, agreeing. Did not the phantom bid me return?—I have returned—he is dead. I have gazed upon a being of another world. To doubt were impious, after that look.”

“Whatever my opinions may be, my dear young friend,” said Small, “I will suspend them for the present—you are still greatly excited; let me advise you to seek some repose.”

“I am easier,” replied Ranulph; “but you are right, I will endeavour to snatch a little rest. Something within tells me all is not yet accomplished. What remains?—I shudder to think of it. I will rejoin you at midnight—I shall myself attend this solemnity—Adieu!”

Ranulph quitted the room. Small sighingly shook his head, and having lighted his pipe, was presently buried in a profundity of smoke and metaphysical speculation.

CHAPTER VIII.

Fran. de Mad. Your unhappy husband
Is dead—

Vit. Cor. Oh, he's a happy husband!
Now he owes nature nothing.

Mon. And look upon this creature as his wife.
She comes not like a widow—she comes armed
With scorn and impudence. Is this her mourning
habit?

THE WHITE DEVIL.

THE progress of our narrative demands our presence in another apartment of the hall—a large darksome chamber, situate in the eastern wing of the house, which we have before described as the most ancient part of the building—the sombre appearance of which was greatly increased by the dingy, discoloured tapestry that clothed its walls, the record of the patience and industry of a certain Dame Dorothy Rookwood, who flourished some centuries ago, and whose skilful needle had illustrated the slaughter of the Innocents, with a severity of *gusto*, and sanguinary minuteness of detail, truly surprising, in a lady so amiable as she was represented to have been. Grim-visaged Herod glared from the ghostly woof, with his shadowy legions, executing their murderous purposes, grouped like an infernal host around him. Mysterious twilight, admitted through the deep, dark, mullioned windows, revealed the antique furniture of the room, which still boasted a sort of dusky splendour, more imposing, perhaps, than its original gaudy magnificence, and showed the lofty hangings, and tall, hearse-like canopy of a bedstead, once a couch of state, but now destined for the repose of Lady Rookwood. The stiff crimson hangings were embroidered in gold, with the emblazonment of Elizabeth, from whom the apartment, having once been occupied by that sovereign, obtained the name of the “Queen’s Room.”

The sole tenant of this chamber was a female, in whose countenance, if time and strong emotion had written strange defeatures, they had not obliterated its striking beauty, and classical grandeur of contour. Her’s was a face majestic and severe—an index of a soul, at once daring in conception, and resolute in action; changeless in its purposes—unyielding—haughty. Pride, immeasurable pride, was stamped in all its lines; and though each passion was, by turns, developed, it was evident that all were subordinate to that sin by which the angels fell. The outline of her face was formed in the purest Grecian mould, and would have been a model for the representation of

vengeful deity; so much did the gloomy grandeur of the severe chiselling of the lip, the rounded beauty of the cheek, and the faultless symmetry of her full form, accord with the beau ideal of antique perfection. Shaded by smooth folds of hair, which still maintained its jetty dye, her lofty forehead would have been displayed to the greatest advantage, had she been at this moment corrugated and deformed, by excess of passion, if that passion can be said to deform, which only lent strength and vehement expression. Her figure, which lent only height to give it dignity, was arrayed in the garb of widowhood; and if she exhibited none of the anguish and distraction of heart, which such a bereavement might have been expected to awaken, she was evidently a prey to feelings far less harrowing. At the particular time of which we speak, this person was occupied in the perusal of a pile of letters. Her gaze, at length, became riveted upon a letter, from a heap of others, which at once arrested her attention. As she read, her whole soul became absorbed in its contents. Suddenly she raised herself, and, crushing the letter in her hand, cast it from her, with a look of ineffable

“O! fool!” exclaimed she, aloud, “weak, wavering, and unstable fool—this alone was wanting, to fulfil the measure of suffering for thee, and for thy memory. The very air I breathed with thee in life, seemed contaminated with thy presence.”

With thee near me, I had ever the consciousness of ties which bound us together, which I would have sacrificed, that I thereby have accomplished my purposes; but now that I deemed I was for ever rid of thee—thou despised—~~that~~ thou shouldst have the power to injure me thus—to frustrate my fairest plans—to put a bar between me and my views of the world, a wrong which could only have been cancelled by death, which should have been the forfeit, had I known this beforehand; to think that I can no longer reach thee—that death has erected an impassable barrier between us, which even I cannot overleap. *That* thought galls me—stings me to the quick; and if curses can reach beyond the grave, may mine be there, and cling to thee; may heaven adjudge thee to the penalty of torture, agonizing as the hell of heart I now endure.

And surely,” added she, after a pause, “the flame of vengeance which I felt to be part of the spirit that burns within me will not expire, when I throw off this fleshly shroud—nor shall I be incapable of executing its tremendous purposes. Oh that my hands could now pursue thee to thy viewless home!”

During the utterance of this imprecation, the features of Elizabeth Rookwood, for she it was, had undergone a marked and sudden change. Her flaming eye, glistening with unnatural brightness, suddenly lost its lustre—her quivering lip, its agitation—her distended nostril—its tension—her upraised

arm fell heavily to her side—she stood like one entranced, as if transformed to stone.

A deep-drawn sigh proclaimed the return of consciousness, and her first movement was slowly to return to the *seer*, whence she had taken the letter, which had caused her agitation. Examining the papers which it contained, with great deliberation, she threw each aside, as soon as she had satisfied herself of its purport, until she had arrived at a little package, carefully tied up with black ribbon and sealed. This Lady Rookwood hastily broke open, and drew forth a small miniature. It was that of a female, young and beautiful, rudely, yet faithfully executed—faithfully, we say, for there was an air of sweetness, and simplicity—and, in short, a look of *reality* and nature, about the picture (it is seldom, indeed, that we mistake a *likeness*, even if ignorant of the original), which attested the artist's fidelity. The face was radiant with smiles, as a bright day with sunbeams. The portrait was set in gold, and behind it was looped a lock of the darkest and finest hair. A slip of paper was also attached to it.

Lady Rookwood scornfully scrutinized the features for a few moments, and then unfolded the paper, at the sight of which she started and turned pale. "Thank God," she cried, "this is in my possession—while I hold this, we are safe. Were it not better to destroy this evidence at once?—No, no, not now—it shall not part from me. I will abide Ranulph's return. Placing the marriage certificate, for such it was, within her breast, and laying the miniature upon the table, she next proceeded, deliberately, to arrange the disordered contents of the box. She then stooped to pick up the crumpled letter, and after carefully adjusting its creases, returned, once more, to its perusal.

All outward traces of emotion, had, ere this, become so subdued, in Lady Rookwood, that although she had, only a few moments previously, exhibited the extremity of passionate indignation, she now, apparently without effort, resumed entire composure, and might have been supposed to be engaged in a matter of little interest to herself. It was a dread calm, which they who knew her would have trembled to behold. "From this letter, I gather," exclaimed she, "that their wretched offspring knows not of his fortune.—That is well—there is no channel, whence he can derive information, and my first care shall be to prevent his obtaining any clue to the secret of his birth. I am directed to provide for him—ha, ha! I will provide—a grave. There will I bury him and his secret. My son's security, and my own revenge, demand it. I must choose surer hands—the work must not be half done, as heretofore. And now, I bethink me, he is in the neighbourhood, connected with a gang of gipsies—'tis well"—even as she spoke, a knock at the chamber door broke upon her meditations. "Agnes, is it you?" demanded Lady Rookwood.

Thus summoned, the old attendant entered the room.

"Why are my orders disobeyed?" asked the lady, in a severe tone of voice. "Did I not say, when you delivered me this package from Mr. Coates, which he himself wished to present, I would be undisturbed."

"You did, my Lady, but—"

"Well," said Lady Rookwood, somewhat more mildly, perceiving, from Agnes's manner, that she had something of importance to communicate. "What is it brings thee hither, now?"

"Sorry am I," exclaimed Agnes, "right sorry, to disturb your Ladyship, but—but—"

"But what?"

"I could not help it, my Lady—he *would* have me come; he said he was resolved to see your Ladyship, whether I would or not."

"*Would* see me, ha!—is it so? I guess his errand, and its object; he has some suspicion. No, that cannot be—he would not dare to tamper with these seals. I will not see him."

"But he swears, my Lady, that he will not leave the house without seeing you—he would have forced his way into your presence, if I had not consented to announce him."

"Insolent!" exclaimed Lady Rookwood, with a glance of indignation; "*force* his way! admit him. I promise you he shall not display an equal anxiety to repeat the visit. Tell Mr. Coates I *will* see him."

"Mr. Coates!—bless you, my Lady, it's not he; he'd never have intruded upon you, unask'd, depend upon it. No; he knows, too well, what he's about, to do such a thing. This is—"

"Who?"

"Luke Bradley—your Ladyship knows who I mean."

"He here—now?—"

"Yes, my Lady; and looking so fierce and strange, I was quite frightened to see him. He looked so like his—his—"

"His father, thou wouldst say—speak out."

"No, my Lady, his grandfather—old Sir Reginald. He's the very image of him; but had not your Ladyship better ring the bell? and when he comes in, I'll run and fetch the servants—he's dangerous, I'm sure."

"Dangerous—how? I have no fears of him. He will see me, you say—"

"Ay, *will*," exclaimed Luke, as he threw open the door, and shut it forcibly after him, striding towards Lady Rookwood, "nor abide longer delay."

It was an instant or two, ere Lady Rookwood, thus taken by surprise, could command speech. She fixed her eyes, with a look of keen and angry inquiry, upon the bold intruder, who

nothing daunted, confronted her gaze, with one as stern and steadfast as her own. Luke was pale, even to ghastliness.

"Who are you, and what seek you?" exclaimed Lady Rookwood, after a brief pause, and, in spite of herself, her voice sounded tremulously. "What would you have with me, that you venture to appear before me at this season, and in this fashion?"

"I might have chosen a fitter opportunity," returned Luke, "were it needed. My business will not brook delay—you must be pleased to overlook this intrusion on your privacy, at a season of sorrow, like the present. As to the fashion of my visit, you must be content to excuse that—I cannot help myself—I may amend hereafter. *Who* I am, you are able, I doubt not, to surmise. *What* I seek, you shall hear, when this old woman has left the room, unless you would have a witness, to a declaration that concerns you as nearly as myself."

An indefinite feeling of apprehension had, from the first instant of Luke's entrance, crossed Lady Rookwood's mind. She, however, answered with some calmness:—

"What you can have to say, is of small moment to me—nor does it signify who may hear it. It shall not, however, be said, that Lady Rookwood feared to be alone, even though she peril'd her life."

"I am no assassin," replied Luke, "nor have sought the destruction of my deadliest foe—though 'twere but retributive justice to have done so."

Lady Rookwood started.

"You need not fear me," replied Luke; "my revenge will be otherwise accomplished."

"Go," said Lady Rookwood to Agnes—"yet—stay with-out, in the anti-chamber."

"My Lady," said Agnes, scarcely able to articulate, "shall I—"

"Hear me, Lady Rookwood," interrupted Luke, "before this woman departs. I intend you no injury—meditate no harm to you, or to any one—my object here is solely to obtain a private conference with yourself. You can have no reason for denying me this request. I will not abuse your patience—mine is no idle mission. Say you refuse me, and I will at once depart. A word will suffice—I am gone. I will find other means of communicating with you—less direct, and therefore less desirable—make your election: but we *must* be alone—undisturbed. Summon your household—let them lay hands upon me, and I will proclaim to all what you would gladly hide, even from yourself."

"Leave us, Agnes," said Lady Rookwood—"alarm no one. I have no fear. I can deal with him myself, should I see occasion."

"Agnes," said Luke, in a stern deep whisper, arresting the

ancient hand-maiden as she passed him, "stir not from the door till I come forth. Have you forgotten your former mistress—my mother! have you forgotten Barbara Lovel, and that night?"

"In heaven's name hush!" replied Agnes, with a shudder.

"Let that be fresh in your memory. Move not a footstep, whatever you may hear," added he, in the same tone as before.

"I will not—I will not;"—and Agnes departed.

Luke felt some wavering in his resolution when he found himself alone with the lady, whose calm, collected, yet haughty demeanor, as she resumed her seat, prepared for his communication, could not fail to inspire him with a certain degree of awe. Not unconscious of her advantage, nor slow to profit by it, Lady Rookwood remained perfectly silent, with her eyes steadily and scrutinizingly fixed upon his face, while his embarrassment momentarily increased. Summoning, at length, courage sufficient to address her, and ashamed of his want of nerve, he thus broke forth:—

"When I entered this room, you asked my name and object. As to the first, I answer to the same designation as your Ladyship. I have long borne my mother's name—I now claim my father's. My object is the restitution of my rights."

"Soh—it is as I suspected," thought Lady Rookwood, involuntarily casting her large eyes down—"Do I hear you rightly?" exclaimed she, aloud—"your name is—"

"Sir Luke Rookwood. As my father's elder born; by right of his right to that title."

If a glance could have slain him, Luke had fallen lifeless at the lady's feet. With a smile of disdain, she said, "I know not why I tolerate this insolent assumption of my son's dignity, even for an instant. This defamation of my husband's name from thy lips to me—"

"Defamation of him in my lips, and to you!" interrupted Luke, scornfully.

"Peace!" cried Lady Rookwood. "I would learn how far thy audacity will carry thee. The name you bear is Bradley?"

"In ignorance I did so," replied Luke, "I am the son of her whose maiden name is Bradley. She was—"

"'Tis false—I will not hear it—she was not," cried Lady Rookwood; her vehemence getting the master of her prudence.

"Your Ladyship anticipates my meaning," returned Luke.

"This is the house of mourning. He who lies a breathless corpse within its walls, your husband was my father."

"That may be true."

"My mother was his wife."

"Thou liest—*she* his wife."

"His wedded wife."

"His mistress—his minion, if thou wilt; nought else. Thou frantic-fool, who has juggled thee with a tale like this! *Wife!*"

A low born jade, his wife : Sir Piers Rookwood's wife—ha ha ! thy fellow hinds would jeer thee out of this preposterous notion. Is it new to thee, that a village wench, who leads herself to shame, should be beguiled by such pretences ? That she was so duped, I doubt not ; but it is too late now to complain ; and I would counsel thee not to repeat thine idle boasts. It will serve no other purpose, trust me, than to blazon forth thy mother's dishonour."

"Dishonour !" furiously reiterated Luke. "My mother's fame is as free from dishonour as your own. Injured she was—her reputation, which was without blemish and without spot, hath been tarnished and traduced ; but it shall, ere long, be made clear in the light of day ; nor she, nor her offspring, be a by-word amongst men. Hear me, Lady Rookwood ; I assert that Susan Bradley was the first Lady of Sir Piers—that I, her child, am first in the inheritance ; nay, am sole heir to her husband's estates and to his titles, to the exclusion of your son. Ponder upon that intelligence—it is a truth—a truth I can establish, for I have proofs—such proofs as will confound you and your arts, were they dark and subtle as witchcraft. I will burst your spells. Men say they fear you, as a thing of ill. I fear you not—it is your turn to blanch. There have been days when the Rookwoods held their dames in subjection. Is there nothing of the Rookwood about me ?"

As Lady Rookwood gazed at him, her heart acknowledged the truth of his assertion. Passion prevented her speech. She looked a scornful negative, and motioned Luke to depart.

"No !" exclaimed Luke ; "my errand is not complete ; nor can I suffer your Ladyship to quit the room, till you have heard me to an end."

"Not suffer me," answered Lady Rookwood, raising herself, and moving towards the door. "How, ruffian, will you detain me ?"

"By showing you the danger of departure," said Luke. "By your leave, Lady, you *must* obey me," he added, taking her arm.

"Never !" exclaimed Lady Rookwood ; her hitherto scarce governable passion enraged beyond all bounds by this last act. "Obey *thy* mandate ! Stay at *thy* bidding ! Release my hand, or by heavens I will stab thee on the spot." And as Luke quitted not his hold, she suddenly snatched up a small penknife, the only weapon of offence at hand, which happened to be lying open upon the table, and struck it with all her force against his breast. Luke, however, sustained no injury. Encountering some hard substance, the slight blade snapped at the haft, without inflicting even a scratch, and Luke, grasping the hand that had aimed the blow, forcibly detained it, while a smile of fierce triumph played upon his features.

"What would you do ?" exclaimed Lady Rookwood.

"Falsify your calumnies: yourself have furnished me with the means. Look here. And clutching her hand, he drew from out the folds of his waistcoat the skeleton hand of his mother, in the bones of which the broken blade was sticking. This dead hand, which has this instant, in all probability, preserved my life, was my mother's! It has done this—it will do more—it will accomplish all the rest. See," added he, stretching forth the shrunken finger, and placing it close by Lady Rookwood's own hand, who recoiled from contact with it, as from the touch of a scorpion—"That ring was placed where you now see it before your own was proffered—that cold hand was pressed to your husband's, at the altar, before his faith was pledged to you. His faith to her was broken, but the vows he broke, were *marriage vows*. The living hand may part with its ring to another—the dead will retain possession, while matter shall endure. Compare them together. The one through her brief life, was ever gentle, ever kindly, ever yielding—the other grasping, severe, inexorable. That is instinct with vitality—with power—this incapable of motion—dead. Yet shall this nerveless hand accomplish more than the living. Years have flown since this ring was placed upon the finger; yet hath it not corroded—not relinquished its hold. Look at it, Lady; consider it well—touch it—examine it—'tis real—actual—your own in shape—in substance—in design; for the same holy end procured—with the same solemn plight bestowed—all the same—save that it was the *first*—ay, the first—let that confound you—let that convince you. With what a voice this silent circlet speaks—how eloquent—how loud. I have no other witness—yet will this suffice. Of those to whom I owe my being, both are dead. Can neither answer to my call? She sleeps within the tomb that now yawns to receive him: he is on his way thither: yet *this* remains to answer for both—to cry out, as from the depths of the grave, for justice to me. Look at it, I say: can you look and longer doubt? You cannot—dare not—do not. I read conviction in your quaking glance—in your averted countenance.

Saying which, he relinquished his hold, and Lady Rookwood withdrew her hand. There is an eloquence, inspired by intense emotion, so vivid, that it never fails to produce a convincing effect, even upon an auditor the most determinately incredulous. So was it with Lady Rookwood. Aware, beforehand, of the truth of Luke's statement, she would nevertheless have admitted nothing; but her daring determination was overwhelmed by surprise at the extent of his knowledge, and by the irresistible vehemence of his manner. With little of their characteristic caution, Luke seemed to inherit all the inborn, terrible impetuosity of his ancestry; and Lady Rookwood's secret soul admitted, that one of the same order as the fierce race

with whose remorseless annals she was too well acquainted, was before her. Some flashes of such a spirit she had heretofore observed in Sir Piers; but a violence like the present she had never before beheld. She heard his words, and her heart, while it swelled with rage, trembled with fear, as yet unknown to her. Contending emotions agitated her frame; pride, shame, rage, and fear, strove for the mastery. With averted head, she seemed lost in thought, while Luke gazed darkly on. Suddenly she turned round, exclaiming in a tone that startled him, as much as the unexpected admission which her words contained,

"I am convinced it is so. You are his son."

"You admit it?"

"Have I not said so?"

"The title is my right?"

"Granted."

"The lands?"

"Your *right* also."

"You will yield possession?"

"When you have *won* it: but not till *then*. Fool! do you take me for an idiot like yourself—like your father? I *do* believe your story—there is no degradation of which I do not deem Sir Piers to have been capable. All thou couldst invent, of folly and insanity, would not equal my conceptions of his capacity to enact them. I believe it all—fully, implicitly; yet I defy thee. Let the thought, that I know thy rights, but will never acknowledge them, rankle, like a barbed arrow, in thy side; and that I also know thy inability to maintain them. *Thou can'st not prove it*. Ha, ha! Now where are thy boasted rights,—thy vaunted titles,—thy imaginary honours,—thy air-built castles—thy unsubstantial visions of greatness? Dissipated by a breath. Listen to me. The marriage was secret—it was without a witness—I *alone could prove it*. Now you have your answer. Tell what you have heard to the world—repeat my words—who will believe you? Try the law: we are in possession—in power; you are poor, unfriended, unknown; no, not unknown: your character is too well known—your name is recognized as that of a desperado, familiar with vice and crime—capable of any deed, however daring. Who will credit such a tale from you? supported by such evidence as you can bring, who are already amenable to the laws of your country? Your life is at this moment forfeited, for a murderous assault committed last night, upon the keeper of my park. For this you, the elder born of Sir Piers Rookwood—the heir apparent to his title—the inheritor of his honourable name, shall suffer the extreme penalty of the law; for by the God above us, I will prosecute you—pursue you to the death. Now, braggart, solicit my mercy—implore my clemency—sue for my terms. You are my prisoner."

our prisoner! Lady Rookwood," returned Luke, laughing
 boldly. "Were your murderous intentions to be punished,
 ere mine. Thrice have you aimed at my life—twice ere
 fate has preserved me; but information of your plots has
 reached me. You cannot crush me; I rise again, to triumph.
 You hinder me, armed as I am, for I *am* armed, to compel
 the peril of your life, to subscribe a declaration of your
 guilt and conviction upon the spot? What hinders me, I say,
 to ensure that my just cause will triumph? I leave its agency
 to him who hath done thus much. Heaven will direct me—my
 conscience will guide me."

"To the gibbet," cried Lady Rookwood—"whence nought
 can rescue thee. Like all fiends, the evil spirit that hath served
 thee will fail thee at the last."

"I place my trust in *her*," said Luke. At that moment his
 eye was riveted by the miniature, which it accidentally en-
 countered. He stooped to raise it. It came like a confirmation,
 even in the storm—a directing light—he pressed it to his
 forehead. "Did I not say so?" exclaimed he; "how else would
 I have fallen into my hands?"

"It is accident," said Lady Rookwood, amazed at the oc-
 currence.

"Accident!" cried Luke; "'tis fate—the fate that presides
 over my doom. Was it accident last night, when the grave
 opened up its dead? when she whose face and features ere here
 were bright, fresh and fair as the day whereon she breathed,
 or the first time revealed to me? No! injured, sainted
 the hour of expiation is at hand. I, thy son, will be the
 agent of thy retribution." Kissing the picture, he placed it
 in his heart.

Once or twice during this speech Lady Rookwood's glances
 wandered towards the bell, as if about to summon aid, but
 attention was abandoned almost as soon as formed, proba-
 bly from apprehension of the consequences of any such attempt.
 As not without alarm, as to the result of the interview,
 as considering how she could bring it to a termination
 without endangering herself; and, if possible, secure at the
 same time the person of Luke, when the latter, turning sharply
 upon her, and drawing a pistol, exclaimed—
 "Follow me!"

"Whither, and for what?" answered she, in astonishment?
 "To the room where lies your husband?"

"Why there? what would you do? villain! I will not trust
 myself with you. I will not follow you."

"Desist not, as you value your life. Do aught to alarm
 me, and I fire. Your safety depends upon yourself. I
 will see his body, ere it is laid in the grave. I will not
 leave you here."

"Go," said Lady Rookwood; "if that be all, I pledge myself you shall not be interrupted."

"I will not take your pledge; your presence shall be my surety. By her unavenged memory, if you play me false, though all your satellites stand around you, you die upon the spot. Obey me, and you are safe. Our way leads to the room by the private staircase—we shall pass unobserved—you see I know the road. The room, by your own command, is vacant—save of the dead. Allow me to compliment you upon your caution. We shall be alone. This done, I depart. You will then be free to act. Disobey me, and your blood be upon your own head."

"Lead on," said Lady Rookwood, pressing towards the anti-chamber.

"The door I mean is there," pointing to another part of the room—"that panel——"

"Ha! how know you that?"

"No matter—follow."

Luke touched a spring, and the panel flying open, disclosed a dim recess, into which Luke entered; and, seizing Lady Rookwood's hand, dragged her after him.

CHAPTER IX.

Mischief, that may be help'd, is hard to know;

And danger, going on, still multiplies.

Where harm hath many wings, care comes too late?

Yet hasty attempts make chance precipitate.

LORD BROOKE. ALAHAM.

THE "Queen's Room" formed one of a suite of apartments traversing the entire eastern wing of the Hall, the upper gallery of which was exclusively devoted, during the later years of her husband's life, to Lady Rookwood's occupation. The antiquated grandeur, and magnificent, though tarnished equipage, of these apartments, were, it may be supposed, more to her taste than the modern conveniences of other rooms, and she domineered it within them, as the bird of night broods amidst the ruins of a desecrated fane, in silent, solitary state. None, save her ancient attendant, Agnes, was suffered to approach her chamber, without an especial summons; a prohibition which was much more satisfactorily complied with than the occasional attendance upon her Ladyship, which was also of necessity required. It has more than once been incidentally remarked,

wing claimed an earlier date than any other part of the house; and the massive construction of its walls, as well as its distance from quarters more inhabited, rendered it impervious to sound, or disturbance of any kind, and, so far, a desideratum. But the same cause precluded the possibility of its being of any aid, in case of any such dangerous emergency as the present.

This latter consideration, however, weighed little with Lady Rookwood. Fear was unknown to her, and she required no assistance, though at all times imperatively insisting on absolute obedience.

The aperture upon which the panel opened, had been a small alcove, and though entirely disused, still retained its cushions and crucifix. There were two other entrances to this place; the one communicating with a further bed-chamber, the other leading to the gallery. Through the latter, after passing the aperture, without relinquishing his grasp, Luke

perceived the growing rapidly dark, and at the brightest seasons the only corridor was but imperfectly lighted from narrow windows that looked into the old, quadrangular court-yard beyond, as they issued from the oratory a dazzling flash of light (a storm having suddenly arisen) momentarily illumined the whole length of the passage, disclosing the retreating figure of a man at the other extremity of the gallery. Lady Rookwood uttered an outcry for assistance, but the man, whom she might be, disappeared in the instantaneously succeeding darkness, leaving her in doubt whether or not her situation was as she perceived. Luke had seen the figure at the same instant, not without apprehensions lest his plans should be discovered; he gripped Lady Rookwood's arm still more strictly, and, holding the muzzle of the pistol to her breast, hurried her forwards. Descending a spiral staircase, which led from the gallery to the lower story, the sound of a conversation were distinctly heard through the thin partition which separated them from the speakers. "Fare you well, and 'tis your last," whispered Luke, pressing her to his side.

Not doubting, from the determined fierceness of his looks, that he would make good his words, and trusting still to the fortuitous occurrence for deliverance, Lady Rookwood, on his thin call, though not within reach, of assistance, was silent. A loud laugh proceeded from the parties in the chamber, with that instinctive quickness, with which everybody perceives the familiar sound, she heard her own name pronounced, coupled with an epithet which sounded anything but complimentary to a lady. She had no difficulty in distinguishing the tones of the voice to be those of Titus Tyrconnel. The language of the speakers seemed such as to assure him of his security, and he was not unwilling that

Lady Rookwood should hear an unbiassed opinion of herself and of her conduct.

"I wonder how long the ould Jezabel will keep us out of the state room?" continued Titus, for it was he.

"Can't say, indeed," returned another voice, which Lady Rookwood knew at once to be Mr. Coates's; "till midnight, most likely, unless *he* prevents it. For my part, I wonder what the devil takes her there, unless, between ourselves, she wishes to be beforehand with the old gentlemen—ha! ha! one would think she'd never have gone there of her own accord. However, as I said before, she's got somebody to manage her, now."

"Ay! ay!" answered Titus, "that youngster will see she does no mischief, he'll take her in hand now; he'll have all properly done, for his father's sake. By St. Patrick, only to think of his coming upon us so unawares. I've not half recovered my surprise yet."

"What will Lady Rookwood say, I wonder, when she sees him," replied Coates; she'd no notion whatever of it; I'm sure it will come upon her like a clap of thunder. I wonder how he got his information—that puzzles me. I thought he was too much out of the way to have heard——"

"That's what bothers me," replied Titus. "How *did* he learn it? But what matters that. Here he is—he's master now; and if he takes my advice, he'll soon make the house cланe of her presence. I'll give him a helping hand, with all the pleasure in life."

"While on that subject," returned the other, "there's one thing more I've got to say—but you'll be silent—I wouldn't have it reach her ears for the world, at least, as coming from me; though, perhaps, it might be as well she did learn a little that's said behind her back. You must know——"

"Pass on," interrupted Lady Rookwood; "I will not stay to hear myself reviled; or," thought she, "are these, also, in his confidence? The plot is deeper than I dream'd it."

Equally surprised with herself at the conversation he had overheard, which appeared to refer to his own situation, though he could in nowise conceive how the speakers obtained their information, unless from the incautious loquacity of Peter Bradley, Luke had listened in silent wonder. The coincidence was, indeed, curious, and affected both parties in different degrees. On the one hand, Luke, though perplexed and astounded, was inspired by confidence; while, on the other, Lady Rookwood was filled with dismay and indignation. Ever distrustful of all around her, she was satisfied that Coates had clandestinely possessed himself of the secret of Luke's legitimacy, and of the fact of the marriage, by breaking the seal of the package and that he had subsequently betrayed it. It was difficult indeed, to reconcile this notion with the delivery of the paper

to her, together with the inclosure of the all-important certificate; but of the existence of a confederacy against her she felt fully convinced. Thus doubting, thus misgiving, her vindictive soul was busied in framing schemes for the overthrow of their plans, and the execution of her own revengeful purposes. Whelming as the ocean, came the full tide of her wrath; and could she at that moment have commanded that raging element to rise and destroy, her furious impulse would have prompted her to confound her supposed enemies and herself in one common fate. With some such thought, determined, though she should seal her own doom, rather than fail defeating their plans, did Lady Rookwood suffer herself to be conducted onwards.

All was now in total obscurity—neither countenance could be perceived, as they trod the dark passage; but Luke's unrelaxed grasp indicated no change in his purposes, nor did the slow, dignified march of the lady betray any apprehension on her part. Their way lay beneath the entrance hall. It was a means of communication little used, crossing from one side of the hall to the other, and received no light, but what was afforded from above. Their tread sounded hollowly on the flagged floor—no other sound was heard. Mounting a staircase, similar to the one from which they had just descended, they arrived at another passage. A few paces brought them to the door. Luke turned the handle, and they stood within the chamber of the dead.

The reader is already aware of the custom observed by the Rookwood family, respecting the solemnization of their funeral obsequies, at midnight, and by torch light. It remains to inform him of another practice, not so rare, namely, the laying of the corpse in state, upon the night of the burial. There was, however, a revolting peculiarity attending this observance. Placed within its shell, the body was never soldered down, until after the grisly mass had been exposed to the gaze of the tenantry; and, in consequence of the horrible exhibitions of which he had heard, and indeed seen, express directions were left by Sir Piers, that his remains should be embalmed, immediately after his demise. In addition to this, was the disposition of an unusual allowance of wine and wasail to the tenantry, it being Sir Piers's opinion, that human nature, even in grief, requires support; and that, with every glass he swallows, the regret of the mourner waxes deeper and more sympathetic, and his laments louder and more strong. And that he was right, the event proved. No Lord of Rookwood had been half so liberal, or was half so much regretted; and if sighs would waft him thither, the worthy Squire was already safe in "Arthur's bosom—if ever man went to Arthur's bosom." His instructions had been more than fulfilled by Titus Tyroconnel. Brimmers of strong ale, goblets of choice wines, flasks of more

potent liquors, together with a goodly supply of baked meats, and other viands, were at the service of every comer; and now having eaten and drunken their fill, all were desirous of taking a last farewell of him to whom they were indebted for their entertainment; nor, perhaps, at the same time, without a desire to behold a spectacle, which had formed, for many days, the chief topic of conversation in the neighbourhood—the body lying in solemn state. For this purpose they had congregated in the hall, before a door that opened into the room in which the body was placed; but all admission having been refused, by the commands of Lady Rookwood, until ten o'clock, as it wanted some quarter of hour to that time, the mutes, who were stationed at the door, dared not, for their lives permit any one to enter.

The room which contained the remains of poor Sir Piers, was arrayed in all that mockery of state, which, vainly attempted to deride death, is, itself, a bitter derision of the living. It was the one devoted to the principal meals of the day—a strange choice, but convenience had dictated its adoption by those with whom this part of the ceremonial had originated, and long custom had rendered its usage, for this purpose, almost prescriptive. This room, which was of some size, had originally formed part of the great hall, from which it was divided by a thick screen of dark lustrously varnished oak, enriched with fanciful figures, carved in bold relief. The walls were panelled with the same embrowned material, and sustained sundry portraits of the members of the family, in every style and fashion of investiture, from the steely trappings of Sir Ranulph, down to the courtly costume of Sir Reginald. Most of the race were ranged around the room; and seen in the red light shed upon their features by the flaring wax flambeaux, they looked like an array of solemn silent witnesses, gazing upon their departed descendant. The sides of the chamber were hung with black, from the surbase to the floor, and upon a bier in the middle of the room rested the body. A wide and ample pall of rich, sable velvet was spread of the supporters of the yet unclosed coffin. Broad escutcheons, decked out in glowing colours, pompously set forth the heraldic honours of the departed. Tall lights burnt at the head and feet, and fragrant perfumes diffused their odours from silver censers. But that which suggested the most painful reflection of all, to those who had known him, was the consideration that, in this very room—nay, on the very spot, where he now rested an inanimate heap, surrounded with all the insignia of mortality, had Sir Piers caroused and made glad, with health and spirits, and friends to boot; where he was now, silent and laid low, had he shouted till the rafters had rung again, with his boisterous merriment. Another hour, and even this room should have lost all trace of him. It had

in the theatre of his revelry and rejoicing, through the rough drama of his life; it was meet, that the last scene of his earthly pilgrimage should close there likewise.

The entrance of Luke and his unwilling companion had been abrupt. The transition from darkness to the glare of light, was most blinding, and they had advanced far into the room ere Lady Rookwood perceived a man whom she took to be one of the mutes, leaning over the bier, before her. The coffin lid was entirely removed, and the person, whose back was towards them, appeared to be wrapt in mournful contemplation of the sad spectacle within. Suddenly bursting from Luke's hold, Lady Rookwood rushed forwards with a scream, and touched the man's shoulder. He started at the summons, and disclosed the features of her son!

Rapidly as her own act, Luke followed. He levelled the pistol at her head, but his hand dropped to his side, as he encountered the glance of Ranulph. All three seemed paralyzed by surprise. Ranulph, in astonishment, extended his arm to his mother, who, placing one arm over his shoulder, pointed with the other to Luke; the latter stared sternly and inquiringly at both—yet none spoke.

CHAPTER X.

We're sorry

His violent act has e'en drawn blood of honour,
And stained our honours;
Thrown ink upon the forehead of our fame,
Which envious spirits will dip their pens into
After our death, and blot us in our tombs;
For that which would seem treason in our lives,
Is laughter when we're dead. Who dares now whisper,
That dares not then speak out; and even proclaim,
With loud words, and broad pens, our closest shame?

THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY.

STERN, indeed, must that bosom be—insensible beyond even human humanity, that would not thrill with gladness at the sight of a long absent child. As tenderly as it was in her iron nature to do, did Lady Rookwood love her son. Her love was stronger, perchance, in that if aught she loved, 'twas him, him alone—all else she hated. In him all her affection was centred—for him, no sacrifice was too great—for his worldly sake she would have braved eternal perdition. And now, at an awkward-for moment, when she deemed him absent in a foreign

land—when his return was what she wished for most—what she would have prayed for, had she prayed for aught—he stood before her; in her hour of peril, and distress, his succouring arm was upraised to defend her. Her son was with her;—her enemy—*his* enemy, within her grasp. Triumph flashed within her eye, and her heart exulted. For one instant she had gazed doubtfully upon his face—her frame shaking with emotion. Spirits she had heard, have wandered near their fleshy tabernacles at such hours as these, and the features seemed so like his father's that she scarce knew what construction to put upon the apparition she beheld. The doubt was of momentary duration. The next instant saw her in the attitude we have attempted to describe.

With that quickness of perception, which at once supplies information on such an emergency, Luke instantly conjectured who was before him. Startled as he was, he yet retained his composure, abiding the result, with his arms folded upon his breast.

"Seize him," cried Lady Rookwood, as soon as she could command her speech.

"He rushes on his death—if he but stir," exclaimed Luke, pointing his pistol; "and you, his mother, shall answer for his life. He is unarmed—he cannot cope with me."

"Bethink you where you are, villain!" cried Ranulph; "you are entrapped in your toils. Submit yourself to our mercy—resistance is vain, and will not secure your safety, while it will aggravate your offence. Surrender yourself——"

"Never," answered Luke; "know you whom you ask to yield?"

"How should I?" answered Ranulph.

"By that instinct which tells me who you are. Ask her—she can inform you, if she will."

"A villain—an impostor," returned Lady Rookwood. "Parley not with him—seize him, at all hazards—his life is our life. He is a robber, a murderer, who has assailed my life."

"Beware," cried Luke to Ranulph, who was preparing to obey his mother's commands—I am no impostor—no robber—no murderer—my soul is as free from stain of guilt like that, though I have many offences to answer for. Do not make me a fratricide."

"Fratricide!" echoed Ranulph, recoiling.

"Ay, *fratricide*, in our dead father's presence."

"Heed him not," ejaculated Lady Rookwood. "It is false—he dares not harm thee, for his soul—I will call assistance."

"Hold, mother!" exclaimed Ranulph, detaining Lady Rookwood; "this man may be what he represents himself. Before we proceed to extremities I would question him. I

"I have mentioned it in your hearing, could it have been out my father had a son."

Rookwood frowned. She would have checked him, rejoined—
"I have spoken the truth, he had a son. I am he—

ent, I command you," vociferated Lady Rookwood.
!" cried Luke, in a loud voice, "Why should I be our bidding—at *your's*—who regard no laws, human who pursue your own fell purposes, without fear of sin. Waste not your frowns on me—I heed them not. Do you think I am like a tame hound, to be cowed to I *will* speak. Ranulph Rookwood, the name you mine, and by a right as good as your own. From his lies a corpse before us, I sprang. No brand of shame birth. I am his son—his lawful begotten—his first or brother—your *elder* brother. To me pertains all you your own. Nay, glance not at me so. Threaten me or me. I say not this to taunt you. I assert no I vouch the truth. You bade me think within presence I stood; bring the thought home to yourself, in that awful form I swear—I would call the dead to witness. Ha! do you heed me now," continued Luke, the shuddering effect which this last appeal produced. "Yes," cried he, rushing towards the bier, he, within his coffin, cold and dead, who through ed me. What if he could arise, and speak for me? Hark the living tremble at the tale he could tell. Hear this body, my *father's* body, I swear that I am his legitimate—his first born; and though to me he hath n, what to a son a father should be; though I have n his smile, never felt his caresses, never received ng, yet now be all forgiven, all forgotten." And he elf, with frantic violence upon the coffin!

Difficult to describe the feelings with which Ranulph's avowal conveyed by Luke's passionate words. Fear and dread predominated. Coupling the fearful vision before his eyes, with the remembrance of the phantasmagined he had beheld, he listened to Luke's adjuration—a sensation that made his flesh creep upon his bones. His fears seemed to be realized, and in a manner, as apprehended almost as preternatural, as the vision itself. Unable to stand, he stood gazing on in silence. Not so Lady Rookwood. The moment for action was arrived. Yet even she had doubts about the line of conduct most prudent to be pursued was in her power. Should she summon the deluder—proclaim him a lunatic—a robber—an assailant—him—or drive him from the house? All, or any of these remedies, she might have recourse to; but none were

unattended by danger, or difficulty. She must do this to secure him. Her retainers were still faithful to her; of that, Ranulph's presence assured her; as she at once saw her mistake in attributing to Luke's situation the chance expressions she had overheard, and which had alarmed her so much at the moment, when they so evidently applied to her son's unexpected return. On their fidelity she could therefore depend. With all these aids—with a certainty of securing him—the task was nevertheless not without hazard, and might endanger all, nay, advance the cause she would fain defeat. This Lady Rookwood felt. Luke was fearless—eloquent—desperate; he might sell his life dearly; but that weighed little with her, if he were slain: on the other hand, he might escape—he might be taken with life—his defence might be so gallant as to produce a strong impression in his favour; he might, she was sure he would, blazon forth his story; and that, at this season, when all the neighbourhood, and perchance his friends amongst the number, were assembled, was a scandal she could not brook. Her eye rolled inwardly, as these thoughts swept darkly across her brain. Suddenly she became tranquil. There is a calm within the storm, more to be dreaded than the whirlwind's self. Addressing her son, she said, in a hollow voice—

"You have heard what he says?"

"I have," answered he, mournfully.

"And you believe him?"

"I can scarce do otherwise. Compare his assertions with what my father, himself, declared to me, before my departure from England. You may remember it. You spoke of the entailment of the lands of Rookwood, averring them to be mine unalienably. Have you forgotten his reply?"

"No," answered Lady Rookwood; "I have not forgotten it; but I will baulk his designs. And now," added she in a whisper, "thy prey is within thy power. Attack him—"

"Wherefore," answered Ranulph: "if he be my brother, shall I raise my hand against him?"

"Wherefore not?" returned Lady Rookwood.

"'Twere an accursed deed," replied Ranulph. "The mystery is solved. 'Twas for this that I was summoned home."

"Ha! what sayest thou?—summoned?"

"Who summoned thee?"

"My father!"

"Thy father?" echoed Lady Rookwood in great surprise.

"Ay, my dead father! He hath appeared to me since his decease; nay, on the moment when his spirit departed to bid me return; why, I knew not. The doubt is now made clear."

"Ranulph, you rave—you are distracted with grief—with astonishment."

"No, mother; he was in the right. The dead will witness for him. I will not struggle against my destiny."

"Destiny! ha—craven—dastard—thou art not my son; not the child of Maud Rookwood; no offspring of her's would utter such a word. Destiny! ha—ha—thy destiny is Rookwood, its manors, its lands, its rent-roll, and its title; nor shalt thou yield it to a base-born churl like this. Let him prove his rights. Let him obtain them. Let the law adjudge them to him, and we will yield—will cease to struggle—but not till then. But I tell thee he has *not* the right, nor can he maintain it. He is a deluded dreamer, who, having heard some idle tale of his birth, believes, because it chimes with his wishes, and now asserts it. He told it me. I treated it with the scorn it deserved. I would have driven him from my presence, but he was armed, as thou seest, and forced me hither, perhaps to murder me; a deed he might have accomplished had it not been for thy intervention. His life is already forfeit, for an attempt of the same sort last night. Why else came he hither? for what else did he drag me to this spot? Let him answer that!"

"I will answer it," replied Luke, raising himself from the bier; his face was of an ashy paleness, and ghastly as the corpse over which he leaned. "I had a deed to do, which I wished you to witness. It was a wild conception; but the means whereby I have acquired the information of my rights, was wild—we are both the slaves of inevitable necessity. Thou hast received thy summons hither—I have had mine. Thy father's ghost called thee; my mother's spectral hand beckoned me. Both are arrived. One thing more remains, and my mission is completed." Saying which, he drew forth the skeleton hand and, having first removed the wedding ring from the finger, placed it upon the left breast of the body. "Rest there," he cried, "for ever."

"Will you suffer that?" said Lady Rookwood, tauntingly, to her son.

"No," replied Ranulph; "such profanation of the dead shall not be endured, were he ten times my brother. Stand aside," added he, advancing towards the bier, and motioning Luke away. Withdraw your hand from my father's body, and remove what you have placed upon it."

"I will neither remove it, nor suffer it to be removed," returned Luke. "'Twas for that purpose I came hither. 'Twas to that hand in life he was united, in death he shall not be divided from it!"

"Hear him," cried Lady Rookwood.

"Such irreverence shall not be;" exclaimed Ranulph, seizing Luke with one hand, and snatching at the sere-clothes with the other. "Remove it, or by heaven——"

"Leave go your hold," said Luke, in a voice of thunder; "you strive in vain." Ranulph ineffectually attempted to push

him backwards; and shaking away the grasp that was fixed upon his collar, seized his brother's wrist, so as to prevent the accomplishment of his purpose. In this unnatural and indecorous strife, the corpse of their father was left of its covering, and the hand discovered lying upon the pallid breast.

And as if the wanton impiety of their conduct called for an immediate rebuke, even from the dead, a frown seemed to pass over their father's features, as their angry glances fell in that direction. This appalling effect was solely occasioned by Lady Rookwood's approach, her shadow falling over the brow and visage of the deceased, produced the appearance we have noticed. Simultaneously quitting each other, with a sense of shame, mingled with remorse, both remained, with eyes fixed upon the dead, whose repose they had violated.

Folding the grave-clothes decently over the body, Luke prepared to depart.

"Hold!" cried Lady Rookwood; "you go not hence."

"Indeed!" replied Luke. "My brother, Ranulph, will not oppose my departure. Who else shall prevent it?"

"That will I," cried a voice behind him; and, ere he could turn to ascertain from whom the exclamation proceeded, Luke felt himself grappled by two nervous assailants, who, snatching the pistol from his hold, fast pinioned his arms. This was scarce the work of a moment, and he was a prisoner, before he could offer any resistance. A strong smile of exultation evinced Lady Rookwood's satisfaction.

"Bravo, my lads, bravo!" cried Coates, stepping forward, for he it was under whose skilful superintendence the seizure had been effected: "famously managed; the best Bow-Street runners couldn't have done it better—capital—hand me that pistol—loaded, I see—slugs, no doubt—oh, he's a precious rascal—search him—that's right—turn his pockets inside out, while I speak to her Ladyship." Saying which, the little Attorney, enchanted with the feat he had performed, approached Lady Rookwood with a profound bow, and an amazing smirk of self-satisfaction. "Just in time to prevent mischief," said he; "hope your Ladyship does not suffer any inconvenience from the alarm—beg pardon, annoyance I meant to say, which this daring outrage must have occasioned; excessively disagreeable this sort of thing, to a lady, at any time, but at a period like this more than usually provoking. However, we have him safe enough now, at your Ladyship's disposal. Very lucky I happened to be in the way—smelt a rat in the hall. Perhaps your Ladyship would like to know how I discovered—"

"Not now," replied Lady Rookwood, checking the volubility of the man of law. "I thank you most heartily, Mr. Coates, for the service you have rendered me; you will now add materially to the obligation already conferred upon me, by removing the prisoner with all convenient despatch."

"Certainly, if your Ladyship wishes it. Shall I detain him close prisoner in the hall for to-night, or remove him, at once, to the round-house?"

"Where you please, so you do it quickly," replied Lady Rookwood, noticing, with great uneasiness, the agitated manner of her son, and apprehensive, lest, in the presence of so many witnesses, he might say or do something prejudicial to their cause. Nor were her fears groundless. As Coates was about to return to the prisoner, he was arrested by the voice of Ranulph, commanding him to stay.

"Mr. Coates," said he, "however appearances may be against this man, he is no robber—you must, therefore, release him."

"Release him, Sir Ranulph?"

"Yes, Sir; I tell you he came here neither to rob, nor to offer violence."

"That is false, Ranulph," replied Lady Rookwood. "I was dragged hither by him, at the peril of my life. He is Mr. Coates's prisoner on another charge."

"Unquestionably, your Ladyship is perfectly right; I have a warrant against him, for assauking Hugh Badger, the keeper, and for other misdemeanors."

"I will myself be responsible for his appearance to that charge," replied Ranulph. "Now Sir, at once, release him."

"At your peril," exclaimed Lady Rookwood.

"Well, really," muttered the perplexed Attorney, "this is the most unaccountable proceeding I ever witnessed."

"Ranulph," said Lady Rookwood sternly to her son, "Beware how you thwart me."

"Yes, Sir Ranulph, let me venture to advise you, as a friend, not to thwart her Ladyship," interposed the Attorney; "indeed she is in the right:" but seeing his advice unheeded, he withdrew to a little distance.

"I will not see injustice done to my father's son," replied Ranulph, in a low tone. "Why would you detain him?"

"Why?" returned she: "our safety demands it—our honour."

"Our honour demands his instant liberation; each moment that he remains in those bonds, tends to our dishonour—I will free him myself from his fetters."

"And brave my curse, foolish boy? You incurred your miserable father's anathema for a lighter cause than this. Our honour—thy honour—my honour, cries aloud for his destruction. Have I not been injured in the nicest point that a woman can be injured? Thinkest thou I could have wedded Sir Piers Rookwood, had I known aught of this marriage; still more, had I dreamed there had been offspring born of it? Have I not been duped? Hast thou not been duped? Shall I lend my

name to mockery and scorn, by base acknowledgment of such deceit, or wilt thou? Where would be my honour then? Stripped of my fair estates—my son—myself—beggars—dependant on the bounty of him. Does honour ask thee to bear this? It is a phantom sense of honour, unsubstantial as thy father's shade, thou speakest of, that would prompt thee otherwise."

"Do not evoke his awful spirit, mother," cried Ranulph, with a shudder; "do not arouse his wrath."

"Do not arouse *my* wrath," returned Lady Rookwood. "I am the more to be feared. Think of Eleanor Mowbray—the bar between your nuptials is removed. Would you raise up a greater impediment?"

"Mother! mother!"

"Would you tamely suffer this new sprung claimant, whom you know not, nor have ever seen, to wrest from you your inheritance, without a struggle? Without Rookwood, I tell you, Eleanor never will be yours—thus much I know of Mrs. Mowbray. Even there he may supplant you—nay, I speak not at random. Let him be in possession, and abide the consequences—he is now in our power. He will rot in jail, or be driven from this country. Speak the word, will you raise up this giant in your path, or crush him, yet ungrown? Elect—choose between him and me."

"Mother—"

"Nay, hear me yet further. Our cause is a righteous one. I have been deceived—thou art deceived. Great wrong hath been done to both. We are warranted by Holy Writ, in such a cause, to have recourse to stratagem. Like Esau, he hath lost his birthright; and even as Rachel did unto Jacob, so will I do to thee. I will make thee the elder—the ruler of thy brother, and of his house."

"But if he be my brother, and if this house be his house, I should sin before heaven to withhold it from him—I will not do it. Your own words betray your conviction of his rights."

"*My conviction!* Ranulph, thou turnest my head to hear thee talk thus. What to me is conviction or doubt? The line of action is plain: let him prove his right, it will then be time enough to succumb. Meanwhile, be he what he may, give him not this advantage—he is now in our power. He hath committed an offence against the laws of his country, which will place his liberty, if not his life, in jeopardy; let him first *disprove* that. Once for all, I tell thee, were he thrice thy father's son, he cannot prove the fact of his mother's marriage. And well he cannot. Were it fitting that the son of a low-born village wench should usurp the titles of the offspring of her who hath borne the name of D'Aubenev—a name which was, me-

thinks, degraded, in merging itself in thine own? Do as thou wilt—act as thou deemest best—gain a brother, if thou seest fitting, and lose thine all—and with thine all, thy mother. Decide quickly—all eyes are directed upon us. The room is now filled with the household—the tenantry—the guests. Proclaim, if you choose, before all, your own degradation—your nothingness, and his elevation—*his* — And here let us part for ever.”

“Enough mother—more than enough—you have decided, though not convinced me. Detain him within the house, if you will, until the morrow. In the mean time, I will consider over my line of conduct.”

“Is this, then, thy resolve?”

“It is. Mr. Coates,” said Ranulph, calling the Attorney, who had been an inquisitive spectator; though, luckily, not an auditor of this interview. “Unbind the prisoner, and bring him hither.”

“Is it your Ladyship’s pleasure?” asked Mr. Coates, who regretted exceedingly that he could not please both parties.

Lady Rookwood signified her assent by a slight bow.

“Your bidding shall be done, Sir Ranulph,” said Coates departing.

“*Sir Ranulph*,” echoed Lady Rookwood, with strong emphasis; “mark’d you that?”

“Well, well,” muttered the Attorney—“this is the most extraordinary family to be sure. Make way, gentlemen, if you please,” added he, pushing his way through the crowd, toward the prisoner.

Having described what took place between Lady Rookwood and her son in one part of the room, we must now, briefly, narrate some incidental occurrences in the other. The alarm of a robber having been taken, spread with great rapidity through the house, and almost all its inmates rushed into the room, including Doctor Small, Titus Tyrconnel, and Jack Palmer.

“Are you there, honey?” said Titus, who discovered his ally, “the bird’s caught, you see.”

“Caught be d—d,” replied Jack, bluffly—“so I see—all his own fault; infernal folly to come here, at such a time as this. What’s it all for, I’d like to know? cursed nonsense. However, it can’t be helped now; he must make the best of it. And as to that sneaking, gimlet-eyed, parchment-skinned, quill-driver, if I don’t serve him out for his officiousness, one of these days, my name’s not Jack Palmer.”

“Och, cushlamacree, did I ever—why what the devil’s the boy to you, Jack? fair play’s a jewel, and surely Mr. Coates only did his duty. I’m sorry he’s caught, for his relationship to Sir Piers, because I think he’ll be tucked up for his pains; and moreover, I could forgive the poaching; but as to the

breaking into a house, on such an occasion as this, ooh! it's a plaguy bad look. I'm afraid he's worse than I expected."

"Bah!" returned Jack, shrugging his shoulders.

"Is this Luke Bradley," asked Small, the unfortunate son of Sir Piers?"

"The same, Dochter, replied Titus; "there's no doubt of his genealogy, if you look at him."

"Unquestionably not," returned Small—"old Sir Reginald Rookwood, who is looking at us from out that picture, might well father that fierce face."

A group of the tenantry, many of them in a state of intoxication, had, in the meantime, formed themselves round the prisoner. Whatever might be the nature of his thoughts, no apprehension was visible on Luke's countenance. He stood erect, amidst the assemblage, his tall form towering above them all, and his eyes fixed upon the movements of Lady Rookwood and her son. He had perceived the anguish of the latter, and the vehemence of the former, attributing both to their real causes. The taunts and jeers, threats, and insolent inquiries, from the hinds, who thronged around him, passed unheeded; yet one voice in his ear, sharp as the sting of a serpent, made him start. It was that of the Sexton.

"You have done well," said Peter, "have you not? Your fetters are, I hope, to your liking. Well! a wilful man must have his own way, and perhaps the next time, you will be content to follow my advice. You must now free yourself, the best way you can, from these Moabites, and I promise you it will be no easy matter. Ha, ha!"

Peter withdrew into the crowd; and Luke, vainly endeavouring to discover his retreating figure, caught the eye of Jack Palmer fixed upon himself, with a peculiar and very significant expression.

At this moment Mr. Coates made his appearance.

"Bring along the prisoner," said the man of law to his two assistants; and Luke was accordingly hurried along, Mr. Coates using his best efforts to keep back the crowd. It was during the pressure that Luke heard a voice whisper in his ear, "Never fear, all's right;" and turning his head, became convinced of the close vicinity of Jack Palmer. The latter elevated his eyebrows with a gesture of silence, and Luke passed on, as if nothing had occurred. He was presently confronted with Lady Rookwood and her son; and notwithstanding the efforts of Mr. Coates, seconded by some few others, the crowd grew dense around them.

"Remove his fetters," said Ranulph, and his manacles were moved.

"You will consent to remain here a prisoner, till to-morrow?"

"I consent to nothing," replied Luke; "I am in your hands."

"He does not deserve your clemency, Sir Ranulph," interposed Coates.

"Let him take his own course," said Lady Rookwood; "he will reap the benefit of it anon."

"Of course," cried the Attorney; "to be sure he will. Ha, ha!"

"I will pledge nothing," returned Luke. "Detain me, at your proper peril."

"Better and better," exclaimed the Attorney. "This is the highest joke I ever heard of."

"I shall detain you then, in custody, until proper inquiries can be made," said Ranulph. "To your care, Mr. Coates, and to that of Mr. Tyrconnel, whom I must request to lend you his assistance, I commit the charge; and I must further request, that you will show him every attention which his situation will permit. Remove him. We have a sacred duty to the dead to fulfil, to which, even justice to the living must give way. Disperse this crowd, and let instant preparations be made for the completion of the ceremonial. You understand me, Sir."

"Ranulph Rookwood," said Luke, sternly, as he departed, "thou hast another—a more sacred office, to perform. Fulfil thy duty to thy father's son."

"Away with him," cried Lady Rookwood. "I am out of all patience with this trifling. Follow me to my chamber," added she to her son, passing towards the door. The concourse of spectators who had listened to the extraordinary scene in astonishment, greatly admiring the clemency of Ranulph, made way for her instantly, and she left the room, accompanied by her son. The prisoner was led out by the other door.

"Botheration!" cried Titus, to Mr. Coates, as they followed in the wake—"Why did he choose out me? I'll lose the funeral, entirely, by this arrangement."

"That you will," replied Palmer. "Shall I be your deputy?"

"No, no," returned Coates. "I will have no other than Mr. Tyrconnel. It was Sir Ranulph's express wish."

"That's the devil of it," returned Titus; "and I, that was to have been chief mourner, and have made all the preparations, am to be left out. I wish Sir Ranulph had stay'd till to-morrow—what could bring him, to spile all—it's cursedly provoking."

"Cursed provoking," echoed Jack.

"But then there's no help, so I must make the best of it," returned the good-humoured Irishman.

"There's a spare room that I know of," said the Attorney, "in the lower gallery of the eastern wing, with never a window, and a comfortable anti-chamber. There we'll dispose of the prisoner, and keep watch in the front room ourselves; and

what with a bowl of punch, and a yard or two of clay, we'll contrive to get through the night tidily, never fear. As to the keeping him *here*, it's all nonsense; but there's something in it all I can't fathom. We shall see what to-morrow will bring forth."

"Ay," replied Jack, with a meaning smile, 'to-morrow ———'"

END OF BOOK THE FIRST.

BOOK II.

The Sexton.

Duchess.—Thou art very plain.

Bosola.—My trade is to flatter the dead, not the living—
I am a tomb-maker.

WEBSTER



BOOK THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

Come, list, and hark ! the bell doth towle
For some but now departing sowle !
And was not that some ominous fowle ?
The bat, the night crow, or screech owle ?
To these I hear the wild wolfe howle,
In this dark night that seems to scowle ;—
All these my black-book shall enrowle.
For hark ! still hark ! the bell doth towle
For some but now departed sowle !

HEYWOOD—RAPE OF LUCRECE.

THE night was wild and stormy. The day had been sultry, with a lurid, metallic-looking sky, hanging, like a vast galvanic plate, over the face of nature. As evening drew on, everything betokened the coming tempest. Unerring indications of its approach were noted by the weatherwise at the Hall. The Swallow was seen to skim the surface of the pool so closely, that he ruffled its mirrored bosom as he passed ; and then, sharply darting round and round, with twittering scream, he winged his rapid flight to his clay-built home, beneath the barn-eaves. The kine that had herded to the muddied margin of the water, and had sought, by splashing, to relieve themselves from the keen persecution of their myriad insect tormentors, wended stallwards, undriven, and deeply lowing. The deer, that at twilight had trooped thither also for refreshment, suddenly "with expanded nostrils, snuffed the air," and bounded off to their coverts, amidst the sheltering fern-brake. The rooks, "obstreperous of wing, in crowds combined," cawed in a way that, as plainly as words could have done, bespoke their apprehension : they were seen, some hovering and beating the air with flapping pinion, others shooting upwards in mid space, as if to reconnoitre the weather, while others, again, were croaking to their mates, in loud discordant tone, from the highest branches

of the lime trees; all, seemingly, as anxious and as busy as mariners before a gale of wind.

At sunset, the hazy vapours, which had obscured the horizon throughout the day, rose up in spiral volumes, like smoke from a burning forest, and becoming gradually condensed, assumed the form of huge billowy masses, which, reflecting the sunlight, changed, as the sinking orb declined, from purple to flame colour, and thence to ashy, angry grey. Night rushed onwards, like a sable steed. There was a dead calm. The stillness was undisturbed, save by an intermittent, sighing wind, which, hollow as a murmur from the grave, died as it arose. At once the clouds turned to an inky blackness. A single, sharp, intensely vivid flash, shot from the bosom of the rack, sheer downwards, and struck the earth with a report like that of a piece of ordnance. In ten minutes it was dunnest night, and a rattling thunder-storm.

A thunder-storm by night! What spectacle is there so magnificently beautiful—so awful—so sublime? Is there aught we can look upon, that can awaken similar feelings of terror, of admiration? Dreadful by day—night is the fitting season to behold it in all its grandeur—in all its terrible beauty. The face of heaven is shrouded, as with a pall. The darkness is almost palpable—a breath can scarce be drawn; suddenly the sight is stricken with a broad, dazzling sheet of flame, rending asunder the tenebrous shroud, and illumining the dense cope of heaven. 'Tis gone! Darkness relieves the aching vision—darkness made more intense by the contrast. Hark! the skies resound with the loud, reverberating roar of heaven's artillery, echoing from cloud to cloud, and seeming, like the voice of the Eternal, to shake the firmament to its foundation. Lo! The vexed air is scathed with forked flashes, each succeeding the other, so fast that the eye is unable to follow their thwart course. Again, 'tis night—again the thunder peals.

Such a storm it was once our fate to witness, belated amongst the Eastern Appenines, on our way from Rome to Terni. Having descended the castellated heights of Narni, we were speeding along a valley, thick with chestnut trees, and hemmed in by mountains on either side, when night and the storm overtook us. We had perceived some symptoms of the coming elemental strife at Narni, but thought we might reach our destination ere its outbreak: and with this hope we urged our course onwards. We were deceived. He who thinks to fly before a storm, amidst those regions, will reckon without his host. We were in the thick of it. Night fell—the tempest arose. The thunder roared—the lightning blazed—we were involved in an atmosphere of flame. The lightning could not be seen, even with eyes closed. The tree-leaves rustled in the wind—the mountain sides returned the thunder's bray. A round was blinding light or pitchy gloom. Still we dashed

on, through darkness, or through fire. Our offers of a *liberal buona mano* were not heeded by the postilion who drove us, and he kept his way in gallant style. Now were he and his horses utterly lost in the black void—now we beheld him bolt upright in his stirrups, crossing himself, whirling his whip round his head, or screaming at the top of his voice, to the drivers of the innumerable wains that impeded our progress. Despite all these, and other risks, we reached Terni in safety, by no means indisposed to exchange our well-windowed britschka, which appeared at that time, to have more attraction for the electric fluid than for ourselves, for the *albergo*, to which it had served as conductor.

To return to our tale: The progress of the storm was watched with infinite apprehension, by the crowd of tenantry assembled in the great hall; and loud and frequent were the ejaculations uttered, as each succeeding peal of thunder burst over their heads. There was, however, one amongst the assemblage, who seemed to enjoy the uproar; a kindred excitement appeared to blaze in his glances, as he looked upon the storm without. This was Peter Bradley. He stood close by the window, and shaded not his eyes, even before the fiercest flashes. A grin of unnatural exhilaration played upon his features, and he seemed to exult in, and to court, the tempestuous horrors, which affected the most hardy amongst his companions with consternation, and made all shrink trembling into the recesses of the room. Peter's conduct was not unobserved, nor his reputation for unholy dealing unremembered. To some he was almost as much an object of dread as the storm itself.

A supply of spirits was here introduced; lights were brought at the same time, and placed upon a long oak table. The party gathering round this, all superstitious terror was put to flight—and even the storm disregarded, in the copious libations that ensued. At this juncture, a loiterer appeared in the hall. His movements were unnoticed by all excepting the Sexton, who watched his proceedings with some curiosity. The person walked to the window, appearing so far as could be discovered, to eye the storm with great impatience. He then paced the hall rapidly backwards and forwards, and Peter fancied he could detect sounds of disappointment, in his muttered exclamations. Again he returned to the window, as if to ascertain the probable duration of the shower. It was a hopeless endeavour; all was pitch-dark without—the lightning was now only seen at long intervals, but the rain still audibly descended in torrents. Apparently, seeing the impossibility of controlling the elements, the person approached the table. The merriment of the party in the mean time waxed loud and boisterous.

“What think you of the night, Mr. Palmer?” asked the Sexton, of Jack, for he was the anxious investigator of the weather.

"Don't know—can't say—set in I think—damned unlucky—for the funeral I mean—we shall be drowned if we go."

"And drunk if we stay," rejoined the Sexton. "But never fear—it will hold up, depend upon it, long before we can start. Why they're not half ready yet; the coffin's only just soldered down, and there's I don't know what of the ceremony to be gone through with. The grace cup to be handed round, and the funeral oration to be delivered by Doctor Small."

"You don't say there's any of that infernal stuff to come," returned Jack, pettishly.

"Why not? It's no more to the Doctor's taste than to your own, but he can't help himself. He must go through with it: it has always been the custom here, and customs are sacred things with the Rookwoods. Ha, ha! Where have they put the prisoner?" asked Peter, with a sudden change of manner.

"I know the room but can't describe it; it's two or three doors down the lower corridor of the eastern gallery."

"Good. And who are on guard?"

"Titus Tyrconnel, and that swivel-eyed quill-driver Costes."

"Enough."

"Come, come, master Peter," cried one of the rustics, "let's have a stave—a chant—I know you can sing—I've heard you—give us one of your odd snatches."

"A good move," seconded Jack. "A song from you—capital."

"I've nothing I can bring to mind, but a ditty which I sang some years ago, at Sir Reginald's funeral. If such will serve you now, you shall have it and welcome."

"By all means," returned Jack.

Preparing himself, like certain other accomplished vocalists, with a few preliminary hems and haws, the Sexton struck forth the following ballad, which we shall entitle

THE COFFIN.

In a church-yard upon the sward a coffin there was laid,
And leaning stood, beside the wood, a Sexton on his spade.
A coffin old and black it was, and fashioned curiously,
With quaint device of carved oak, in hideous fantastic.

For here was wrought the sculptured thought of a tormented face,
With serpents lithe that round it rieth, in folded strict embrace.
Grim visages of grinning fiends were at each corner set,
And emblematic scrolls, mort-heads, and bones, together met.

"Ah, well-a-day!" that Sexton gray unto himself did cry,

"Beneath that lid much lieth hid—much awful mystery.

"It is an ancient coffin from the abbey that stood here;

"Perchance it holds an abbot's bones, perchance those of a friere.

"In digging deep, where monks do sleep, beneath yon cloister
shrined,

"That coffin old, within the mould, it was my chance to find;

"The costly carvings of the lid I scraped full carefully,

"In hope to get at name or date, yet nothing could I see.

"With pick and spade I've plied my trade, for sixty years and more,

"Yet never found, beneath the ground, shell strange as that before;

"Full many coffins have I seen—have seen them deep or flat—

"Fantastical in fashion—none fantastical as that."

And saying so, with heavy blow the lid he shattered wide,

And pale with fright, a ghastly sight that Sexton gray espied,

A miserable sight it was, that loathsome corpse to see,

The last, last, dreary, darksome stage of fallen humanity.

Though all was gone save reeky bone, a green and grisly heap,

With scarce a trace of fleshly face, strange posture did it keep:

The hands were clench'd the teeth were wrench'd, as if the wretch
had risen,

E'en after death had ta'en his breath, to strive and burst his prison.

The neck was bent, the nails were rent, no limb or joint was
straight;

Together glued, with blood imbued, black and coagulate.

And as the Sexton stooped him down, to lift the coffin plank,

His fingers were defiled all o'er with slimy substance dank.

"Ah! well-a-day!" that Sexton gray unto himself did cry,

"Full well I see how Fate's decree foredoomed this wretch to die;

"A living man, a breathing man, within the coffin thrust

"Alack! alack! the agony ere he returned to dust."

A vision dear did then appear unto the Sexton's eyes;

Like that poor wight before him straight he in a coffin lies.

He lieth in a trance within that coffin close and fast;

Yet though he sleepeth now, he feels he shall awake at last.

The coffin then, by reverend men, is borne with footsteps slow,

Where tapers shine before the shrine—where breathes the requiem
low,

And for the dead the prayer is said, for the soul that is not flown.

Then all is drown'd, in hollow sound, the earth is o'er him thrown.

He draweth breath—he wakes from death to life more horrible:

To agony! such agony no living tongue may tell.

Die! die! he must, that wretched one! he struggles, strives in vain;

No more heaven's light, nor sunshine bright, shall he behold again.

"Gramercy, Lord!" the Sexton roar'd, awakening suddenly,

"If this be dream, yet doth it seem most dreadful so to die,

"Oh, cast my body in the sea! or hurl it on the shore!
 "But nail me not in coffin fast—no grave will I dig more."

It was not difficult to discover the effect produced by this song. In the lengthened faces of the greater part of the audience. Jack Palmer, however, laughed loud and long.

"Bravo, bravo!" cried he, "that suits my humour exactly; I can't abide the thoughts of being put under-ground—no coffin for me."

"A gibbet might, perhaps, serve your turn as well," muttered the Sexton; but further conversation was interrupted by a summons to attend in the state room. Silence was at once completely restored; and, in the best order they could assume, they followed their leader, Peter Bradley. Jack Palmer was amongst the last to enter, and looked a not incurious spectator of a by no means common scene.

Preparations had been made to give due solemnity to the ceremonial. The leaden coffin was fastened down, and enclosed in an outer case of oak, upon the lid of which stood a richly-chased, massive silver flagon, filled with burnt claret, called the grace-cup. All the lights were removed, save two lofty wax flambeaux, which were placed to the back, and threw a lurid glare upon the group immediately about the body; this group consisted of Ranulph Rookwood, and some other friends of the deceased. Doctor Small stood in front of the bier; and, under the directions of Peter Bradley, the tenantry and household were formed into a wide half-moon across the chamber. There was a hush of expectation, as Doctor Small looked gravely around; and even Jack Palmer, who was as little likely as any man to yield to an impression of the kind, felt himself moved by the scene.

The very orthodox Small, as is well known to our readers, held everything savouring of the superstitious of the scarlet Woman in supreme abomination; and, entertaining such opinions, it can scarcely be supposed that a funeral oration would find much favour in his eyes, accompanied, as it was, with the accessories of censer—of candle—of cup—all evidently derived from that period when, under the three-crowned Pontiff's sway, the shaven priest pronounced his benediction o'er the dead, and released the penitent's soul from purgatorial flames, while he heavily mulcted the price of his redemption from the possessions of his successor. Small resented the idea of treading in such steps, as an insult to himself and to his cloth. Was he, the intolerant of papistry, to tolerate this? Was he, who could not endure the odour of Catholicism, to have his nostrils thus polluted—his garments thus defiled—by actual contact with it? It was not to be thought of: and he had formally signified his declination to Mr. Coates, when a little conversation with that gentleman, and certain weighty considerations therein held forth

(the advowson of the church of Rookwood being resident with the family), and represented by him, as well as the placing in juxtaposition of penalties to be incurred by refusal, that the scruples of Small gave way; and, with the best grace he could muster, very reluctantly promised compliance.

With these feelings, it will be readily conceived that the Doctor was not in the best possible frame of mind for the delivery of his exhortation. His temper had been ruffled by a variety of petty annoyances, amongst the greatest of which was the condition whereunto the good cheer had reduced his clerk, Zachariah Trundletext, whose reeling eye, pendulous position, and open mouth, proclaimed him absolutely incapable of office. Zachariah was, in consequence, dismissed, and Small commenced his discourse unsupported. But as our recording it would not probably contribute to the amusement of our readers, whatever it might to their edification, we shall pass it over with very brief mention. Suffice it to say, that the oration was so thickly interstrewn with lengthy quotations from the Fathers—Chrysostomus, Hieronimus, Ambrosius, Basilus, Bernardus, and the rest, with whose recondite latinity, notwithstanding the clashing of their opinions with his own, the Doctor was intimately acquainted, and which he moreover delighted to quote, that his auditors were absolutely mystified and perplexed, and probably not without design. Countenances of such amazement were turned towards him, that Small, who had a keen sense of the ludicrous, could scarce forbear smiling, as he proceeded; and if we could suspect so grave a personage of waggersy, we should almost think that, by way of retaliation, he had palmed some abstruse monkish funeral discourse upon his astounded auditors. A strong impression was, however, produced upon his hearers, more by his manner than by the incomprehensible language in which his admonitions were conveyed.

The oration being concluded, biscuits and confectionary were, according to the old observance, handed to such of the tenantry as chose to partake of them. The serving of the grace-cup, which ought to have formed part of the duties of Zachariah, had he been capable of office, fell to the share of the Sexton. The bowl was kissed, first by Ranulph, with lips that trembled with emotion, and afterwards by his surrounding friends; but no drop was tasted, a circumstance which did not escape Peter's observation.

His work being nearly completed, he looked around for Jack Palmer, whom he had remarked during the discourse, but could nowhere discover him. Peter was about to place the flagon, now almost drained of its contents, upon its former resting-place, when Small took it from his hands.

"*In poculi fundo residuum non relinque*, admonisheth Pythagoras," said the Doctor. "Let there be no dreg left in the cup

—thy task is complete.” Saying which, he returned it to the Sexton.

“My task here is ended,” muttered the Sexton, “but not elsewhere. Foul weather or fine—thunder or calm, I must to the church.” Bequeathing his final instructions to certain of the household, who were to form part of the procession, in case the procession set out, he opened the hall door, and, the pelting shower dashing heavily in his face, took his way up the avenue. “Now this is what I like,” thought he, “when my skin is heated with drink, to be soaked through and through—to hear the heavy rain pattering amongst the leaves of the trees. It will soon be over,” added he, holding out his hand; “thus is it ever—your storm—your deluging shower, pours down, and is done; but your mizzling, muddling mist drags out the day. Give me the storm—ha, ha!”

Lights streamed through the chancel window as the Sexton entered the church-yard, darkly defining all the ramified tracery of the noble Gothic arch, and illuminating the gorgeous dyes of its richly-stained glass, profusely decorated with the armorial bearings of the founder of the fane, and the many alliances of his descendants. The sheen of their blazonry gleamed bright in the darkness, as if to herald to his last home another of the line whose achievements it displayed. Glowing colourings, chequered like rainbow tints, were shed upon the broken leaves of the adjoining yew-trees, and upon the rounded grassy tombs.

Opening the gate, as he looked in that direction, Peter became aware of a dark figure, enveloped in a large black cloak, and, what appeared to be a plumed hat, standing at some distance, between the window and the tree, and so intervening as to receive the full influence of the stream of radiance, which served to dilate its already almost superhuman stature. The sexton stopped. The figure remained stationary. There was something singular, both in the costume and situation of the person. Peter, being naturally of an inquisitive turn, his curiosity was speedily aroused, and, familiar with every inch of the church-yard, he determined to take the nearest cut, and to ascertain to whom the mysterious cloak and hat belonged. Making his way over the undulating graves, and instinctively rounding the head-stones that intercepted his path, he speedily drew near the object of his inquiry. From the moveless posture which it maintained, the figure appeared to be unconscious of Peter’s approach. To his eyes, it seemed to expand as he advanced. He was now almost close upon it, when missing his footing, owing to the uncertain state of the ground, rendered slippery by the rain, he stumbled forwards; and although he arose upon the instant, the figure had vanished.

Peter stared in amazement.

“What can this mean?” exclaimed he. “Who, or what have I beheld?—this was the exact spot upon which it stood—this

flag—Randolph Crewe's grave. This stone clanks firmly beneath my feet. It could never be poor Randolph's ghost. He could scarce afford a coat to cover his back during his lifetime, much less a cloak and cap that might become a baron. And the devil is too wise to trust him. What if it be old Sir Ranalph, that I have seen? that feather looked like the sculptured plume upon his marble helm. I have heard he walks on nights like these. And then the voice I heard last night. Tut, it cannot be. Had I not slipped over yon unlucky hillock, it would not have escaped me, had it been human. But I must not tarry here, for ghost or goblin—the funeral train will tread upon my kibes else.”

Peter hastened to the church porch, and after shaking the wet from his clothes, as a water-dog might shake the moisture from his curly hide, and wringing his broad felt hat, he entered the holy edifice. The interior seemed one blaze of light to the Sexton, in his sudden transition from outer darkness. Some few persons were assembled, probably such as were engaged in the preparations, but there was one small group which immediately attracted his attention.

Near the communion-table were three persons, habited in deep mourning; apparently occupied in examining the various monumental sculpture that enriched the walls. Peter's office led him to that part of the church. About to descend into the vaults, to make the last preparations for the reception of the dead, with lantern in hand, keys, and a crowbar, he approached the party. Little attention was paid to the Sexton's proceedings, till the harsh grating of the lock attracted their notice.

Peter started, as he beheld the face of one of the three, and relaxing his hold upon the key, the strong bolt shot back in the lock. There was a whisper amongst the party. A light step was heard advancing towards him, and ere the Sexton could sufficiently recover his surprise, to force open the door, a female figure stood by his side.

The keen, inquiring stare which Peter bestowed upon the countenance of the young lady, so abashed her, that she hesitated in her purpose of addressing him, and hastily retired. It was not admiration of the exquisite grace and beauty of the person who had approached him, that attracted the Sexton's regard, for Peter was no idolater of feminine loveliness—it was not the witchery of the dark blue eyes, into whose depths he gazed, that drew enraptured worship from his steely soul—it was not to peruse the enchanting outline of that face, or to mark her free and fawn-like step—it was with nothing of pleasurable emotion, but with a mixed feeling of wonder and curiosity, that he gazed upon her.

Reinforced by her companions, an elderly lady and a tall handsome man, whose bearing and deportment bespoke him to be a soldier, the fair stranger again ventured towards Peter.

"You are the Sexton," said she, addressing him in a voice sweet and musical.

"I am," returned Peter—it was harmony, succeeded by dissonance.

"You perhaps can tell us then," said the elderly lady, "whether the funeral is likely to take place to-night? we thought it possible that the storm might altogether prevent it."

"The storm is over as nearly as may be," replied Peter. "The body will soon be on its way; I am but now arrived from the Hall."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the lady. "None of the family will be present, I suppose; who is the chief mourner?"

"Who but young Ranulph?" answered the Sexton. "There may be more of the family than were expected."

"Is he returned?" asked the young lady, with great agitation. "I thought he was abroad—that he was not expected; are you sure you are rightly informed?"

"Rightly informed!" echoed Peter; "I parted with him at the Hall not ten minutes since. He returned to-night, most unexpectedly."

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed the younger lady, "that this should be—that I should meet him here. Why did we come!—let us depart."

"It is impossible," replied her mother; "the storm forbids it. It is so strange, I scarce can credit it. Are you sure of this?" addressing Peter.

"I have told you so. Other things, as strange, have happened at the Hall," muttered he.

"What mean you?" asked the gentleman, noticing this remark.

"You had not needed to ask the question of me, had you been there, amongst the other guests," retorted Peter. "Odd things have been done there this night, and strange things may occur before the morning."

"You are insolent, sirrah; I comprehend you not."

"Enough! I can comprehend *you*," replied Peter, doggedly; "I know the count of the mourners invited to the ceremonial. Methinks there are three too many."

"Know you this saucy knave, mother?"

"I cannot call him to mind, though I fancy I have seen him before."

"My recollection serves me better, lady," interposed Peter. "I remember one, who was once the proud heiress of Rookwood—ay, proud and beautiful—then the house was filled with her gallant suitors. Swords were crossed for her. Hearts bled for her. Yet she favoured none, until one hapless hour. Sir Reginald Rookwood *had* a daughter; Sir Reginald *lost* a daughter. Ha—I see I am right. Well, he is dead and buried; and Reginald, his son, is dead likewise; and Sir Piers is on

his road hither; and you are the last, as in the course of Nature, you might have been the first. And, now, that they are all gone, you do rightly to bury your grievances with them. All that perplexes me, is to see you *here*; and yet not altogether that, for young Ranulph Rookwood is now lord of the ascendant, and mayhap—ha, I see—

‘But of right, and of rule, to the ancient nest,
The rook that with rook mates, shall hold him possess.’

Are you familiar with that old saying, of your house?”

“Silence, sirrah,” exclaimed the gentleman, “or I will beat your brains out with your own spade.”

“No; let him speak—he has awakened thoughts of other days,” said the lady, with an expression of anguish.

“I have done,” said Peter, “and must to work; will you descend with me, Madam, into the sepulchre of your ancestry? All your family lie within—ay, and the Lady Eleanor amongst the number.”

“Not for worlds,” replied Mrs. Mowbray, for it was she who spoke.

“If my brother would bear me company, I would almost venture to enter the vault,” said the younger lady.

“Eleanor, it is a wild wish!”

“And perhaps a wrong one,” returned she; “but I know not how it is, an impulse, which I can scarce define, prompts me to visit that tomb. Will you go with me, mother?”

“It is a dismal place; but if you wish to go, I will not oppose your inclination—my son will attend us.” And they approached the door.

The Sexton held the lantern so as to throw its light upon the steps as they descended towards the gloomy receptacle of the departed. Our readers are already acquainted with its appearance. Eleanor half repented having ventured within its dreary limits; so much did the appearance of the yawning cells, surcharged with mortality, and, above all, the ghostly figure of the grim night, affect her with dread, as she looked wistfully around. She required all the support her brother’s arm could afford her; nor was Mrs. Mowbray altogether unmoved.

“Whom does that marble effigy represent?” asked Eleanor.

“The first Sir Ranulph,” returned the Sexton, with a grin.

Peter walked slowly on, holding the light to the mouth of each recess, as he passed. Coffin upon coffin was discovered. He paused. “There lies Sir Reginald,” quoth he—“and *there*, crushed in her coffin, even as she was crushed in her brief existence, the Lady Eleanor. Ay! look upon it—there lies your mother,” addressing Mrs. Mowbray; “*your* ancestress, young lady,” turning to Eleanor. “Beauty, after all, is but a frail

flower. It soon withers. She was once as beautiful as you are, and scarce had numbered more years to her life, when she was brought hither. Alas! that I should have to tell it. You who have so much loveliness, would do well sometimes to think of this, when your heart beats high with conquest; for the moth's thousand glorious dyes are not more readily effaced, than beauty's flaunting attractions. Your comeliness is not more easily dust, than that gaudy insect's winged splendor, which the slightest touch will efface."

"This place is not more frightful than that man," whispered Eleanor to her brother.

"And all the family are here interred, you say?" inquired Mrs. Mowbray.

"All," replied the Sexton.

"Where, then, lies Sir Reginald's younger brother?"

"Who?" exclaimed Peter, starting.

"Alan Rookwood."

"What of him?"

"Nothing of moment; but I thought you could perhaps inform me. He died young."

"He did," replied Peter, in an altered tone, "very young; but not before he had lived to an old age of wretchedness. Do you know his story, Madam?"

"I have heard it."

"From your father's lips?"

"From Sir Reginald Rookwood's—never. Call him not my father, sirrah; even *here* I will not have him named so to me."

"Your pardon, Madam," returned the Sexton. "Great cruelty was shown to the lady Eleanor, and may well call forth implacable resentment in her child; yet methinks the wrong he did his brother Alan, was the foulest stain with which Sir Reginald's black soul was dyed."

"The wrong he did my mother was the fouler," said Mrs. Mowbray, furiously. "How can a churl like thou judge in such cases, or institute any parallel between them?"

"True—true—how can I judge?" rejoined the sexton. "I have no feeling left for aught; and if I had, I am a base-born churl, and ought not to indulge it. But methinks, he who wrongeth his brother, in the nicest point in which man can be wronged—who robbeth him of one rich gem, entrusted to a brother's keeping—who stabbeth him where he is most defenceless—most exposed, yet where he should be arrow-proof—who druggeth, with subtle poison, the sacred cup of fraternal love, cannot well sin more deep and damnable."

"And did Sir Reginald do this?" demanded Major Mowbray.

"He wronged his brother's honour," replied the Sexton;

"he robbed him of his wife—poisoned his existence, and hurried him to an early grave."

Eleanor shudderingly held back during this horrible narration, the hearing of which she would willingly have shunned, had it been possible.

"Can this be true," asked the Major.

"Too true, my son," replied Mrs. Mowbray sorrowfully.

"Gracious God! and he could live to a good old age, with such a crime upon his conscience."

"His conscience!—ha, ha," echoed the Sexton. "He was not troubled with the burthen."

"And where lies the unfortunate brother?" said Major Mowbray.

"Abroad—I know not where. Suffice it he is at rest."

"And what became of her—the wretched, guilty—doubly guilty one!" asked Mrs. Mowbray.

"She died, despairing," replied the Sexton, in a hollow voice.

"They had a daughter—what of her?" inquired Mrs. Mowbray.

"A daughter! God in heaven!" exclaimed Major Mowbray.

"Ay—a daughter!" returned the Sexton. "Start not, Sir; she was born before Sir Reginald broke his faith with God and man. They were spared that guilt."

"Thank heaven," exclaimed the Major. "What became of her?"

"She is dead, likewise, I have heard," returned Peter. "The injured and the injurer are gone—the destroyer and his victims."

Awaiting no reply, Peter further traversed the vault, elevating the light, so as to reveal the contents of each cell. One circumstance filled him with surprise and dismay—he could no where perceive the coffin of his daughter. Convinced that he himself had placed it upon the pile before him—no one, of whom he was aware could have entered the vault, subsequently to his visit; yet, although the keys had never quitted his possession, it would appear that the coffin had been removed. In vain he peered into each recess—they were full—they were undisturbed; and, with much internal marvelling and misgiving, Peter gave up the search. "Some one must have a key of the place, that I wot not of," murmured he to himself; "yet that is scarce likely; and then the unaccountable intrusion which I experienced last night in my conference with Luke, would seem as if—what, the dead meddle with the dead—impossible! but this must be looked to. Now I be-think me, Luke stayed for some space within the vault; what if he found some means to hide it? it is more than probable." As he moved his footsteps, his companions silently followed.

He stopped, and signifying, that all was finished, they not unwillingly quitted this chamber of death, leaving him behind them."

"It is a dreadful place," whispered Eleanor to her mother, "nor would I have visited it, had I conceived anything of its horrors. And that strange man! who or what is he, that he talks in a strain so forbidding?"

"Ay, who is he?" asked Major Mowbray.

"I recollect him now," replied Mrs. Mowbray; "he is one who hath ever been connected with the family. He had a daughter, whose beauty was her ruin: it is a sad tale; I can not tell it now: you have heard enough of misery and guilt; but that may account for his bitterness of speech. He was a dependant upon my poor brother."

"Poor man!" replied Eleanor; "if he has been unfortunate, I pity him. I am sorry we have been into that dreadful place. I am very faint; and I tremble more than ever, at the thought of meeting Ranulph Rookwood again. I can scarce support myself—I am sure I shall not venture to look upon him."

"Had I dreamed of the likelihood of his attending the ceremony, rest assured, dear Eleanor, we should not have been here: but I was informed that there was no possibility of his return; and upon that understanding alone it was, I came; but being here, I will not withdraw. Compose yourself, my child. It will be a trying time to both of us; but it is now inevitable."

At this moment the bell began to toll. "The procession has started," said Peter, as he passed the Mowbrays. "That bell announces the setting out."

"See yonder persons hurrying to the door," exclaimed Eleanor, with eagerness, and trembling violently. "They are coming. Oh! I shall never be able to go through with it, dear mother!"

Peter hastened to the church door, where he stationed himself, in company with a host of others equally curious. Flickering lights in the distance, shining like stars through the trees, showed them that the procession was collecting in front of the Hall. The rain had now entirely ceased; the thunder only muttered from afar, and the lambent lightning seemed only to lick the moisture from the trees. The bell continued to toll, and its loud booming awoke the drowsy echoes of the valley.

A striking change had taken place, even in this brief period, in the appearance of the night. The sky, heretofore curtained with darkness, was now illumined by a serene, soft moon, which, floating in a watery halo, tinged with radiance the edges of a few ghostly clouds, that hurried along the deep and starlight skies. The suddenness of the change could not fail to excite surprise and admiration, mingled with regret,

that the procession had not been delayed until the present time.

Slowly and mournfully the train was seen to approach the church-yard, winding, two by two, with melancholy step, round the corner of the road. First came Doctor Small; then he mutes, with their sable panoply—next, the torch-bearers—next, those who sustained the coffin, bending beneath the ponderous burthen, followed by Sir Ranulph, and a long line of attendants, all plainly to be distinguished by the flashing torch-light.

The church-yard was thronged by the mournful train. The long array of dusky figures—the waving torch-light, gleaming oddly in the white moonshine—now glistening upon the sombre habiliments of the bearers, and on their shrouded load—now reflected upon the spectral branches of the yew trees, or falling upon the ivied buttresses of the ancient church, constituted no unimpressive picture. Over all, like a silver lamp, hung in the still sky, shone the moon, shedding a soothing, spiritual lustre over the scene.

The pealing organ broke into a solemn strain, as the coffin was borne along the mid aisle—the mourners following, with reverend step, and slow. It was deposited near the mouth of the vault, the whole assemblage circling around it. Doctor Small proceeded with the performance of that magnificent service appointed for the burial of the dead, in a tone as remarkable for its sadness, as for its force and fervour. There was a tear in every eye—a cloud on every brow.

Brightly illumined as was the whole building, there were still some recesses which, owing to the intervention of heavy pillars, were thrown somewhat into shade; and in one of these, supported by her mother and brother, stood Eleanor, a weeping witness of the scene. She beheld the palled coffin silently borne along—she saw one dark figure slowly following—she knew those pale features—oh, how pale they were! A year had wrought a fearful alteration; she could scarce credit what she beheld. He must, indeed, have suffered—deeply suffered; and her heart told her that his sorrows had been for her. He paused—he raised his melancholy eyes, and, for an instant, looked around; they wandered on empty space—yet those dark orbs seemed to settle upon her—to penetrate her soul. She trembled with emotion—her blood mounted to her cheeks—her heart fluttered like the dove's; he saw her not. The agony—the ecstasy is past. The service proceeds, and she fain would listen; the sounds reach her ears, but not their import—one thought alone absorbs her.

Many a woeful look, besides, was directed to the principal figure in this ceremonial—to Ranulph Rookwood. He was a prey to unutterable anguish of soul; his heart bled inwardly, for the father he had lost. Mechanically following the body

down the aisle—he had taken his station near it, gazing with confused vision, upon the by-standers—had listened, with a sad composure to the expressive delivery of Small, until he read—*“For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain: he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them.”*

“Verily!” exclaimed a deep voice; and Ranulph looking round, met the eyes of Peter Bradley fixed full upon him; but it was evidently not the sexton who had spoken.

Ranulph withdrew his glance; but, in spite of his anxiety to forget it, that look haunted him. Small continued the service. He arrived at this verse:—*“Thou hast set our misdeeds before thee; and our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.”*

“Even so!” exclaimed the voice; but Ranulph looked not again. His heart melted within him; and leaning his face upon his hand, he wept aloud. In the fulness of his grief, he took little note of passing things: he was absorbed in affliction. Scheme and speculation, for future conduct, were all swept away, by the strong tide of woe—were all banished, by the reflections of the emptiness and unsubstantiality of human existence. Death swallowed all. Ranulph became, as it were, entranced. A hand was laid upon his shoulder—it was that of Doctor Small.

“Command yourself, I entreat of you, my dear Sir Ranulph,” said the Doctor, “and suffer this melancholy ceremonial to be completed.” Saying which, he gently withdrew Ranulph from his support and the coffin was lowered into the vault.

Ranulph remained for some time in the extremity of sorrow. When he in part recovered, the crowd had dispersed, and few persons were remaining within the church; yet near him stood three apparent loiterers. They advanced towards him. An exclamation of surprise and joy burst from his lips.

“Eleanor!”

“Ranulph!”

“Is it possible? Do I indeed behold you, Eleanor?”

No other word was spoken. They rushed into each other's arms. Oh sad!—sad is the lover's parting—no pang so keen; but if life hath a joy more exquisite than others—if felicity hath one drop more racy than the rest in her honeyed cup, it is the gust of happiness which the lover enjoys in such a union as the present. To say that he was as one raised from the depths of misery, by some angel comforter, were a feeble comparison of the transport of Ranulph. To paint the thrilling delight of Eleanor—the trembling tenderness—the fond abandonment, which vanquished all her maiden scruples, would be impossible. Reluctantly yielding—fearing, yet complying, her lips were sealed in one long, loving, holy kiss, the sanctifying pledge of their tried affection.

"Eleanor—dear Eleanor," exclaimed Ranulph—"though I hold you within my arms—though each nerve within my frame, assures me of your presence—though I look into those eyes, which seem fraught with greater endearment than ever I have known them wear—yet, though I see and feel, and know all this, so sudden, so unlooked-for is the happiness, that I could almost doubt its reality. Why—why am I so blest? Forgive me, Eleanor, if so many dark oppressions weigh upon my brain, that what I fain would wish the most, I most discredit; and though I hold thee to my bosom, and feel to my heart's inmost core that thou art nigh me, yet do I fear that the fate which hath brought thee hither, may tear thee from me. Speak—speak, dear Eleanor, and say, to what blessed circumstances I am indebted for this unlooked-for happiness."

"I am here—we are here, dear Ranulph; but the melancholy occasion of our meeting is one which represses even my joy at seeing you. We are staying not far hence, with friends; and my mother, hearing of her brother's death, and wishing to bury all animosity with him, resolved to be present at the sad ceremony. We were told you could not be here."

"And would my presence have prevented your attendance, Eleanor?"

"Not that, dear Ranulph; but——"

"But what?"

"I feared to meet you."

"Why fear, dear Eleanor?"

She turned aside without answering.

At that moment, a recollection of his mother's warning words, and of the change that might take place in his fortunes, crossed Ranulph's mind as the baleful shadow of a fiend flitting over a Paradise; and he shuddered.

"We are but secondary in your regards, Sir Ranulph," said Mrs. Mowbray, advancing.

"Sir Ranulph!" mentally echoed the young man—"What will *she* think, when she knows that that title is not mine?—I dread to tell her." He then added aloud, with a melancholy smile—"I crave your pardon, Madam, but the delight of a meeting so unexpected with your daughter must plead my apology."

"None is wanting, Sir Ranulph," said Major Mowbray. "I who have known what separation from my sister is, can readily excuse your feelings. But you look ill."

"I have, indeed, experienced much mental anxiety," said Ranulph, looking at Eleanor; "but that is now past, and I would fain hope that a brighter day is dawning." His heart answered, 'twas but a hope.

"You were unlooked-for here to-night, Ranulph," said Mrs.

Mowbray—"by us at least: we were told that you were abroad—that you could not be here."

"You were rightly informed, Madam," replied Ranulph. "I was unlooked-for, not by you alone, but by all. I only arrived this evening from Bourdeaux."

"From Bourdeaux!" exclaimed Eleanor.

"From Château La Rivière, on the Garonne," replied Ranulph.

"Châteaux La Rivière!" echoed Eleanor, in surprise. "And so you visited the dear old house? Were you aware who had been its inhabitants?"

"I was, dear Eleanor," replied Ranulph; "I have resided there during the last two months."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Mowbray. "And Madame Derville and her husband —"

"Were well, when I departed."

"I am delighted to hear it. And how did you contrive to find out the house?—you must tell me all about it, dear Ranulph."

"Not now, Eleanor," interrupted Mrs. Mowbray—"you forget."

"I did, indeed, forget," said Eleanor, saddening.

"We must depart," said Mrs. Mowbray, addressing Ranulph. "We are staying with the Davenhams, at Braybrook, and shall remain there. Adieu."

"My days of mourning will be broken by painful yet necessary duties, which will not admit delay," returned Ranulph; "I will ride there to-morrow. There is much on which I would consult you all. I would have ventured to request the favour of your company at the Hall, had the occasion been other than the present."

"And I would gladly have accepted your invitation, had the season been more suitable, Sir Ranulph," returned Mrs. Mowbray; "I would gladly see that house again. During your father's lifetime I could not approach it; now you are owner of the mansion, it will delight me much to behold it once more. 'Tis a fine old house!—You are lord of broad lands, Sir Ranulph—a goodly inheritance."

"Madam!"

"And a proud title, which you will grace well, I doubt not. The first, the noblest of our house, was he from whom you derive your name. You are the third Sir Ranulph; the first founded the house of Rookwood, the next advanced it—'tis for you to raise its glory to its acme."

"Alas! Madam, I have no such thought."

"And wherefore not?—you are young—you are wealthy—you are powerful. With such demesnes as those of Rookwood

—with such a title as its lord can claim, nought is too high to aspire to.”

“I aspire to nothing, Madam, but your daughter’s hand ; and even that I will not venture to solicit until you are acquainted with ——” and he hesitated.

“With what ?” asked Mrs. Mowbray.

“Dear Ranulph—for mercy’s sake—not now—speak not of it now—” interrupted Eleanor.

“A singular, and to me most perplexing event hath occurred to-night,” replied Ranulph, “which may materially effect my future fortunes.”

“Your fortunes !” echoed Mrs. Mowbray, “Doth it relate to your mother ?”

“No, Madam, not to her, to another !”

“Ha ! what other ?”

“Do not—pray do not press this matter further now, dear mother,” said Eleanor, “you distress him.”

“You shall know all to-morrow,” said Ranulph.

“Ay, to-morrow, dear Ranulph,” said Eleanor ; “and whatever that morrow may bring forth, it will bring happiness to me, so you are bearer of the tidings.”

“Dear Eleanor !”

“I shall expect your coming with impatience,” said Mrs. Mowbray.

“And I,” said Major Mowbray, who had listened thus far in silence, “would offer you my services fully, in any way you think they would be useful to you. Command me as you think fitting.”

“I thank you heartily,” returned Ranulph. “To-morrow you shall learn all. Meanwhile it will be my business to investigate the truth or falsehood of the statement I have heard, ere I report it to you.”

As they issued from the church it was grey dawn. Mrs. Mowbray’s carriage was at the door. The party entered it ; and, accompanied by Doctor Small, whom he found within in the vestry, Ranulph walked towards the Hall, where a fresh surprise awaited him.

CHAPTER II.

Black Will. Which is the place where we're to be concealed?

Green. This inner room.

Black Will. 'Tis we. The word is, "Now I take you."

ALDEN OF FEVERHAM.

LEAVING Ranulph Rookwood on his way to the Hall, we shall now return to the captive.

Guarded by the two young farmers, who had displayed so much address in seizing him, Luke was conveyed in safety to the small chamber in the eastern wing, destined by Mr. Coates, to be his place of confinement for the night. The room, or rather closet, opening from another room, was extremely well adapted for the purpose for which it was chosen, having no perceptible outlet; being defended, on either side, by thick partition walls, of the hardest oak, and at the extremity, by the solid masonry of the mansion. It was, in fact, a remnant of the building anterior even to the first Sir Ranulph's day; and the narrow limits of Luke's cell had been erected long before the date of his earliest progenitor. Having seen his prisoner safely bestowed, the room was carefully examined—every board sounded—every crevice and corner peered into by the needle eye of the little lawyer, and nothing being found insecure, the light was removed—the door locked—the rustic constables dismissed, and a brace of pistols loaded, and laid on the table, Mr. Coates pronounced himself thoroughly satisfied and quite comfortable.

"Comfortable!" Titus heaved a sigh, as he echoed the word—it found no echo in his heart. He felt anything but comfortable. His heart was with the body all the while. He thought of the splendour of the funeral—the torches—the illumined church—his own dignified march down the aisle, and the effect he expected to produce amongst the bewildered rustics. He thought of all these things, and cursed Luke by his Gods. The sight of the musty old apartment, hung round with faded arras, which, as he said, "smelt of nothing but rats and ghosts, and such like varmint," did not serve to inspirit him; and the proper equilibrium of his temper was not completely restored until the entrance of the butler into the room, with all the requisites for the manufacture of punch, afforded him some prospective solace.

"And what are they all about now, Tim?" asked Titus.

"They are all carousing," answered the domestic; "Dr. Small is just about to pronounce the funeral ration."

"Devil take it," replied Titus, "there's another miss— Couldn't I just slip out, and see that?"

"By no means," said Coates. "Consider, Sir Ranulph is there."

"Ah Tim!" said Titus, heaving a deep sigh and squeezing a lemon: "do you recollect the way I used to brew for the *old Squire*, with a bit of fruit at the bottom of the glass? And then to think that, after all, I should be left out of his funeral—it's the very height of barbarity. You are sure this is *biling* water, Tim,—for after all, that's the secret of making good toddy, and you may take my word for it, Tim. This rum of yours is poor stuff—there's no punch worth the trouble of drinking, but whiskey—a glass of right potheen, straw colour, peat-flavour, ten degrees over proof, would be the only thing to drown my cares. Any such stuff in the cellar? There used to be an odd bottle or so, Tim?"

"I've a notion there be," returned Timothy. "I'll try the old bin, and if I can lay hands upon one, your honour shall have it, you may depend."

The butler departed, and Titus, emulating Mr. Coates, who had already enveloped himself, like Juno, in a cloud, proceeded to light his pipe.

Luke, meanwhile, had been left alone, without light. He paced about his narrow prison; a few steps was all its space afforded; until, wearied with the fruitless exertion, he at length sat down. He had much to meditate upon, and with nought to check the current of his thoughts, nought to distract his attention, in silence, in solitude, and in darkness, he pondered deeply upon his past, his present situation, and his future prospects. The future was gloomy enough—the present fraught with danger. And now that the fever of excitement was passed, he severely reproached himself for his precipitancy. His mind, by degrees, assumed a more tranquil state; and, exhausted with his great previous fatigue, he threw himself upon the floor of his prison-house, and addressed himself to slumber. The noise he made induced Coates to enter the room, which he did with a pistol in each hand, followed by Titus, with a pipe and candle; but finding all safe, the sentinels retired.

"One may see, with half an eye, that you're not used to a feather bed, my friend," said Titus, as the door was locked. "By the powers, but he's a tall chap, any how—why his feet almost touch the door. I should say that room was a matter of six feet long, Mr. Coates."

"Exactly."

"Well, that's a good guess. Curse that ugly rascal, Tim; he's never brought the whiskey yet; but I'll be even with him to-morrow. Couldn't you just see to the prisoner for ten minutes, Mr. Coates?"

"Not ten seconds. I shall report you, if you stir from your post."

Here the door was opened, and Tim entered with the whiskey.

"Ah, by my soul, Tim, and here you come at last—uncork it, man, and give us a thimble full—blob—there goes the stopper—here's a glass"—smacking his lips—"whist, Tim, another drop—stuff like this will never hurt a body. Mr. Coates, try it—no—I thought you'd be a man of more taste."

"I must limit you to a certain quantity," replied Coates, "or you will not be fit to keep guard—another glass must be the extent of your allowance."

"Another glass! and do you think I'll submit to any such iniquitous proposition?"

"Beg pardon, gentlemen," said Tim; "but her ladyship desires me to tell you both, that she trusted you would keep the strictest watch upon the prisoner. I have the same message also from Sir Ranulph."

"Do you hear that?" cried Coates.

"And what are they all about now, Tim?" asked Titus.

"Just starting, Sir—they're all getting ready," returned Tim; "and, indeed, I must not lose my time gossiping here, for I be wanted now. You must be pleased to take care of yourselves, gentlemen, for an hour or so, for there will be only a few women-kind left in the house. The storm's just over, and the men are all lighting their torches. Oh, it's a grand sight!" And off set Tim.

"Bad luck to myself, any how," ejaculated Titus; "this is more than I can bear—I've had enough of this watch and ward business—if the prisoner stirs, shoot him, Mr. Coates, if you think proper—I'll be back in an hour."

"I tell you what, Mr. Tyrconnel," said Coates, coolly, taking up the pistol from the table, "I'm a man of few words, but those few are, I hope, to the purpose, and I'd have you to know that if you stir from that chair, or attempt to leave the room, dammee if I don't send a brace of bullets after you. I'm serious, I assure you." Saying which, he cocked the pistol.

Titus attempted no further reply; but deliberately brewed himself a glass of toddy.

"That's your last glass," said the inexorable Coates.

To return once more to Luke. He slept uneasily for some short space, and was awakened by a sound which reached his dreaming ears, and connected itself with the visions that slumber was weaving around him. It was some moments before he could distinctly remember where he was. He would not venture to sleep again, though he felt impelled by drowsiness—there was a fixed pain at his heart, as if circulation were suspended. Changing his posture, he raised himself upon one

arm—he then became aware of a scratching noise, somewhat similar to the sound he had heard in his dream, and perceived, what he had not before noticed, a light gleaming through a crevice in the oaken partition. His attention was immediately arrested, and placing his eye close to the chink, which had probably been originally occasioned by the warping of the wood, could distinctly perceive a dark lantern burning; and, by its light, a man filing some implement of house-breaking. The light fell before the hard features of the man, with whose countenance Luke was familiar; and although only one person came within the scope of his view, Luke could make out from a muttered conversation that was carried on, that he had a companion. The parties were near to him, and though speaking in a low tone, Luke's quick ear caught the following discourse:

"Curse the darkey,"* said he of the file—"I can't see the teeth of this here handsaw, and sharp they must be, or I shall never cut through the plate-chest in time—Where's the jemmy,† and the kate?‡ Softly, softly, thoul't never larn judgment, Dick Wilder—Don't I tell thee that that cursed law-lurcher is keeping watch in the next room, and it won't do to disturb 'em just now! We must ramshackle the house first, before we think of tackling him."

"Well, for my part," replied Wilder, "I can't see the use of meddling with that business; but, however, Jack Palmer will have it so, and he's in a manner our Captain, and we must obey him. That youngster's not like one of us—he's but a canting runaway, and not a reg'lar scampman like ourselves; for my part, I should leave him to the care of his old lockeram jaw'd granddad; but, as I said before, Jack's will is law—besides, we owe him a good turn—we shall have a prize to-night—thank's to his management—I've already got my share of the lurrice—and you've pocketed a few—eh, Bob?"

"Ay, but nothing to what we shall have—there's a mint o' money, and a power of plate, besides jewels, beyond all price, in the old lady's room. She keeps all locked up in her strong box—as Jack has found out. I stole there myself, to have a look at the place aforehand, and were just creeping towards her chamber, when I seed the old Lady and this here Luke Bradley make their appearance. I heard her screeching; but, as you may suppose, I didn't tarry for much questioning."

"You might have saved us all this trouble, had you remained," returned Wilder.

"Ay, but it wouldn't fadge then—but what rig keeps Jack? We're all ready for the job—and I tell you what, Rob Rust, I've made my clasp knife as sharp as a razor, and dammee

* Dark lantern.

† Iron crow.

‡ Pick-lock.

if that old woman gives me much of her jaw. If you see her talking in future, may I come to the ~~yellow~~ ~~time's~~ up."

Suppressed laughter, from Rust, followed ~~this~~ ~~and~~. That laugh made Luke's blood run cold within ~~his~~ ~~veins~~.

A footstep was now heard in the room, and ~~presently~~ ~~for-~~wards, exclamations of surprise, and smothered ~~laughter~~ ~~was~~ heard from the parties.

"Bravo, captain—famous. That dress would ~~serve~~ ~~as~~ devil himself."

"I think it will answer the purpose," returned ~~he~~ ~~as~~ ~~he~~

"but what cheer, pulls!—Is all ready?"—*Ay. y.* ~~and~~ all's ready."

"There, off with your stamps, and on with your ~~list~~ ~~signs~~ not a word. Follow me, and, for your lives, don't ~~move~~ ~~a~~ step, but as I direct you. The word must be, 'Sir Piers Rookwood calls.' We'll overhall the swag here; and hark ye, my lads, I'll not budge an inch till Luke Bradley be set free. He's an old friend, and I always stick by old friends. I'd do the same for either of you, so no flinching; besides, I owe that spider shank'd, untwelling, split-cause Coates, who ~~stands~~ ~~against~~ a grudge, and I'll pay him off, as Paul did the Ephe-stane. You may crop his ears, or slit his tongue, as you would a magpie's, or any other chattering varmint; make him sign his own testament, or treat him with a touch of your *Hoten* (*topus* Aot, if you think proper, or give him a taste of the blue plumb. And now to business."

Saying which, they noiselessly departed; but, carefully as they closed the door, Luke's ear could detect the sound.—They were gone—what was he to do!—the house would be robbed. The immediate attack would be directed to Lady Rookwood, in case of resistance she would be murdered; and that this was no idle supposition, the character of the men too well assured him. And then, with hands, perhaps, dripping with her blood, they would return, to release him from prison; in reality, the master of the house, after they had despoiled it. His blood was chilled with horror—and felt what all must have experienced, who have been so situated, with the will but not the power, to assist another—a sensation almost approaching to torture. At this moment a distant scream burst upon his ears—another—he hesitated no longer. With all his force he thundered against the door.

"What do you want, rascal?" inquired Coates, from without.

"There are robbers in the house."

"Thank you for the information. There is one I know of already."

"Fool, they are in Lady Rookwood's room—fly to her assistance."

"A likely story, and leave you here."

"Do you hear that scream?"

"Eh, what—what's that?—I do hear something, but it may be all a trick."

Luke dashed himself with all his force against the door. It burst open, and he stood before the astonished Attorney.

"Advance a footstep, scoundrel," said Coates, presenting both his pistols, "and I will lodge a brace of bullets in your head."

"Listen to me," said Luke; "there are robbers in the house—they are in Lady Rookwood's chamber—they will plunder the place of everything—perhaps murder her. Fly to her assistance, I will accompany you—assist you—it is your only chance."

"My only chance—*your* only chance, rascal; do you take me for a green horn? This is a poor subterfuge; could you not have vamped up something better? But back to your own room, or I will make no more of shooting you, than I would of snuffing that candle."

"Be advised, Sir—I warn you—Lady Rookwood herself will throw all the blame on you. There are three of them—give me a pistol, and fear nothing."

"Give you a pistol! Ha, ha—to be its mark myself. You are an amusing rascal, I will say."

"Sir, I tell you not a moment is to be lost. Is life nothing? she may be murdered."

"I tell you, once for all, it won't do; go back to your room, or take the consequence."

"But it shall do, any how," exclaimed Titus, flinging himself upon the Attorney, and holding both his arms; "you've bullied me long enough—I'm sure the lad's in the right."

Nothing heeding the disputants, Luke snatched the pistols from the hands of Coates.

"Very well, Mr. Tyrconnel; very well, Sir," cried the Attorney, boiling with wrath, and spluttering out his words—

"Extremely well, Sir; you are not perhaps aware, Sir, what you have done; but you will repent this, Sir—repent, I say—repent was my word, Mr. Tyrconnel."

"Repent be d—d," replied Titus.

"Follow me," cried Luke; "settle your differences hereafter. Quick, or we shall be too late."

Coates hustled after him, and Titus, putting the neck of the forbidden whiskey bottle to his lips, and gulping down a hasty mouthful, snatched up a rusty poker, and followed the party with more alacrity than might have been expected from so portly a personage.

CHAPTER III.

Gibbet. Well, gentlemen, 'tis a fine night for our enterprise.

Hounslow. Dark as hell.

Bagshot. And blows like the devil.

Boniface. You'll have no creature to deal with but the ladies.

Gibbet. And I can assure you, friend, there's a great deal of address, and good manners, in robbing a lady. I am the most of a gentleman, that way, that ever travelled the road.

BEAUX STRATAGEMS.

ACCOMPANIED by her son, Lady Rookwood, on quitting the chamber of the dead, returned to her own room. They were alone. She renewed all her arguments—had recourse to passionate supplications—to violent threats; all were ineffectual. Ranulph maintained profound silence. He listened with melancholy attention, but replied not. Passion, as it often doth, defeated its own ends; and Lady Rookwood, seeing the ill effect her anger would probably produce, gradually softened the asperity of her manner, and suffered Ranulph to depart.

Left to herself and the communings of her own troubled spirit, her fortitude, in a measure, forsook her under the pressure of the difficulties that seemed to press on all sides. There was no plan she could devise—no scheme adopt, unattended with extremest peril. She must act alone—with promptitude, with decision, with secrecy: to win her son over was her chief desire, and that at all hazards, she was resolved to do. But how?—She knew but of one point upon which he was vulnerable—one weak part on which the citadel of his firm soul was accessible—one link by which she could enchain him. His love for Eleanor Mowbray was that link. By raising doubts in his mind, and showing fresh difficulties, she would compel him to acquiesce in her machinations, as a necessary means of accomplishing her own object. This she wished to effect, but still she doubted; there was a depth of resolution in the placid stream of Ranulph's character, which she had already often fathomed. She knew his firmness, and she dreaded that his sense of justice should be stronger than his passion, ardent though she knew the latter to be. But the trial should be made.

As she wove these webs of darkness, fear, hitherto unknown, took possession of her soul. She listened to the howling of the wind—to the vibration of the rafters—to the thunder's roar, and to the hissing rain; till she, who never trembled at the

thought of danger, became filled with apprehension and vague uneasiness.

She summoned her attendant, Agnes. The old handmaiden remarked the perturbed manner of her mistress, but made no comment. Lights were ordered; and when Agnes returned, Lady Rookwood fixed a look so wistful upon her, that she ventured to address her. Agnes trembled as she spoke—

"Bless you, my Lady, but you look very pale, and no wonder. I feel sick at heart, too. It's all over, and he is gone to his account—poor master! he who feared so much to die—and then such a night as it is for his funeral! Oh, my Lady, I shall be glad when they return from the church, and happier still when the morning dawns—I can't sleep a wink—can't close my eyes, but I think of him."

"Of him?"

"Of Sir Piers, my Lady; for though he's dead, I don't think he's gone."

"How?"

"Why, my Lady, the corruptible part of him's gone sure enough; but the incorruptible, as Doctor Small calls it—the *esprit*, my Lady—it might be my fancy, your Ladyship; but as I'm standing here, when I went back into the room just now for the lights, as I hope to live, I thought I saw Sir Piers in the room."

"You are crazed, Agnes."

"No, my Lady, I'm not crazed—it was mere fancy, no doubt; but I thought I saw him. Oh, it's a blessed thing to live with an easy conscience—a thrice blessed thing to *die* with an easy one, and that's what I never shall, I'm afraid. Poor Sir Piers! I'd mumble a prayer for him, if I durst."

"Hence—leave me," said Lady Rookwood.

Agnes left the room.

"What if the dead can return?" thought Lady Rookwood. "All men doubt it, yet all men believe it. I would not believe it, were there not a creeping horror that overmasters me, when I think of the state beyond the grave—Ha—what sound was that?—a stifled scream!—Agnes!—without there!—she hears me not—she is full of fears—I am not free from them myself, but I will shake them off. This will divert their channel," drawing forth out of her bosom the marriage certificate. "This will arouse the torpid current of my blood—'*Piers Rookwood to Susan Bradley*.' And by whom solemnized? The name is Checkley—Richard Checkley—ha, I bethink me—a Romish priest—a recusant—who was for some time concealed in the house, during that wench's lifetime. I have heard of this man—he was afterwards imprisoned, but escaped—he is either dead, or in a foreign land. No witnesses—~~the~~ well! Methinks Sir Piers Rookwood did well to preserve this—it shall

light his funeral pyre—would he could now behold me, as I consume it.”

She held the paper in the direction of the candle; but, ere it could touch the flame, it dropped from her hand. As if her horrible wish had been granted, before her stood the figure of her husband! Lady Rookwood started not. No sign of trepidation or alarm, save the sudden stiffening of her form, was betrayed. Her bosom ceased to palpitate—her respiration stopped—her eyes were fixed upon the apparition.

The figure moved not, but regarded her sternly. It was at some little distance, within the shade cast by the lofty bedstead. Still she could distinctly discern it; it was no optical deception; it moved—it was attired in the costume Sir Piers was wont to wear—his hunting dress. All that her son had told her, rushed to her recollection. The phantom advanced; its countenance was pale, and wore a gloomy frown.

“What would you destroy?” asked the apparition, in a hollow tone.

“The evidence of——”

“What?”

“Your marriage.”

“With yourself, accursed woman?”

“With Susan Bradley.”

“With her!” shouted the figure, in an altered tone—“With her—married to her! then Luke is legitimate, and heir to this estate!” Uttering which, the apparition rushed to the table, and secured the document. “A marriage certificate!” it ejaculated—“here’s a piece of luck! By the triple tree of St. Gregorie, but this is a prize worth drawing—it ain’t often in our lottery life we pick out a ticket like this. One way or the other, this must turn up a few cool thousands!”

“Restore that paper, villain,” exclaimed Lady Rookwood, recovering all the audacity natural to her character, the instant she discovered that the intruder was mortal—“restore it, or, by heaven, you shall rue the hour in which you dared ——”

“Softly, softly,” replied the pseudo-phantom, with one hand pushing back the lady, while the other conveyed the precious document to the custody of his nether man, giving the buckskin pocket a slap—“two words to that, my Lady. I know its value as well as yourself, and *must* make my market. The highest offer has me, your Ladyship; he’s but a poor auctioneer, that knocks down his ware to the first bidder. Luke Bradley may come down more handsomely with the stumpy.”

“Who are you, ruffian, that take the guise of Sir Piers Rookwood? To what end is this masquerade assumed? If for the purpose of terrifying me into compliance with the schemes of that madman, Luke Bradley, whom I presume to

be your confederate, your labour is mis-spent—*your stolen disguise* has no more weight with him than *his forged claims*."

"Forged claims. Damme, he must be a prime *faït**, to have forged that. But your Ladyship is in error—Luke Bradley is no confederate of mine."

"Both are robbers. You steal from the father—he from the son."

"Come, my Lady, these are hard words—I have no time to bandy talk. What money have you in the house?—be alive."

"You *are* a robber, then?"

"Robber!—not I—I'm a tax-gatherer—a collector of *Rich Rates*—Ha, ha! But come, what plate have you got? Nay, don't be alarmed—take it quietly—these things can't be helped—make up your mind to it without more ado—much the best plan—no screaming—it may injure your lungs, and can alarm nobody. Your maids have done as much before—it's beneath *your* dignity to make so much noise. So, you will not heed me? As you will." Saying which, he deliberately cut the bell cord, and drew out a brace of pistols at the same time.

"Agnes!" shrieked Lady Rookwood, now seriously alarmed.

"I must caution your Ladyship to be silent," said the robber, who, as our readers will no doubt have already conjectured, was no other than the redoubted Jack Palmer. Cocking a pistol, "Agnes is already disposed of," said he. "However like your deceased 'Lord and master' I may appear, you will find you have got a very different *spirit* from that of Sir Piers to deal with. I am, naturally, the politest man breathing—have been accounted the best bred man on the road, by every lady whom I have had the honour of addressing; and I should be sorry to sully my well-earned reputation by anything like rudeness. But I know the consequence of my character, and must, at all hazards, support it. I must use a little force, of the gentlest kind. Perhaps you will permit me to hand you to a chair—bless me, what a wrist your Ladyship has got. Excuse me if I hurt you; but you are so devilish strong. Curse me if I ever thought to be mastered by a woman. What, ho! 'Sir Piers Rookwood calls'—"

"Ready," cried a voice.

"That's the word," echoed another; "Ready."—And, immediately, two men, their features entirely hidden by a shroud of black crape—accoutered in rough attire, and each armed with pistols, rushed into the room.

"Lend a hand," said Jack.

Even in this perilous extremity, Lady Rookwood's courage did not desert her. Anticipating their purpose, ere her assailants could reach her, she extricated herself from Palmer's grasp,

* Forger.

and rushed upon the foremost so unexpectedly, that before the man could seize her, which he endeavoured to do, she snatched a pistol from his hand, and presented it at his head with a fierceness of aspect, like that of a tigress at bay—her eye wandering from one to the other of the group, as if selecting a mark.

There was a pause of some few seconds, in which the men looked at the lady, and then at their leader. Jack looked blank.

"Hem!" said he, coolly—"This is something new—disarmed—defied by a petticoat. Hark ye, Rob Rust; the disgrace rests with you. Clear your character by securing her at once. What! afraid of a woman!"

"A woman!" repeated Rust, in a surly tone; "devilish like a woman indeed. Few men could do what she have done. Give the word, and I fire; but as to seizing her, that's more than I'll engage to do."

"Then damn you for a coward," said Jack. "Seize her I will—I will steer clear of blood—if I can help it. Come, Madam, surrender, like the more sensible part of your sex, at discretion. You will find resistance of no avail;" and he stepped boldly towards her.

Lady Rookwood drew the trigger. The pistol flashed in the pan. She flung away the useless weapon, without a word.

"Ha, ha!" said Jack, as he leisurely stooped to pick up the pistol, and approached her Ladyship—"the bullet is not yet cast, that is to be my billet. Here," added he, dealing Rust a heavy thump upon the shoulder with the butt end of the piece—"take back your snapper, and look you prick the touch-hole, or your barking iron will never bite for you. And now, Madam, I must take the liberty of again handing you to a seat. Dick Wilder, the cord—quick. It distresses me to proceed to such lengths with your Ladyship—but safe bind, safe find, as Mr. Coates would say."

"You will not bind me, ruffian."

"Indeed, but your Ladyship is very much mistaken—I have no alternative—your Ladyship's wrist is far too dexterous to be at liberty. I must furthermore request of your Ladyship to be less vociferous—you interrupt business, Madam, which should be transacted with silence and deliberation."

Lady Rookwood's rage and vexation at this indignity were beyond all bounds. Resistance, however, was useless, and she submitted, in silence. The cord was passed tightly round her arms, when it flashed upon her recollection, for the first time, that Coates and Tyrconnel, who were in charge of her captive in the lower corridor, might be summoned to her assistance. This idea had no sooner crossed her mind than she uttered a loud and protracted scream.

"Damnation!" cried Jack—"civility is wasted here. Give me the gag, Rob?"

"Better slit her squeaking pipe, at once," replied Rust, drawing his clasp knife—"she'll thwart everything."

"The gag, I say—not *that*."

"I can't find the gag," exclaimed Wilder, savagely. "Leave Rob Rust to manage her—he'll silence her, I warrant you, while you and I rummage the room."

"Ay, leave her to me," said the other miscreant. "Go about the room, and take no heed—her hands are fast—she can't scratch—I'll do it with a single gash—send her to join her Lord, whom she loved so well, before he's under ground. They'll have something to see when they come home from the master's funeral—their mistress cut and dry for another.—Ho, ho!"

"Mercy, mercy!" shrieked Lady Rookwood.

"Ay, ay, I'll be merciful," said Rust, brandishing his knife before her eyes. "I'll not be long about it. Leave her to me—I'll give her a taste of Sir Sidney*."

"No, no, Rust—by God, you shan't do that," said Jack, authoritatively—"I'll find some other way to gag the jade."

At this moment a noise of rapid footsteps was heard within the passage.

"Assistance comes," screamed Lady Rookwood. "Help! help!"

"To the door," cried Jack. The words were scarcely out of his mouth, before Luke dashed into the room, followed by Coates and Tyrconnel.

Palmer and his companions levelled their pistols at the intruders, and the latter would have fired, but Jack's keen eye having discerned Luke amongst the foremost, checked further hostilities for the present. Lady Rookwood, meanwhile, finding herself free from restraint, had rushed towards her deliverers, and crouched beneath Luke's protecting arms, which were extended, pistol in hand, over her head. Behind them stood Titus Tyrconnel flourishing the poker, and Mr. Coates, who, upon the sight of so much warlike preparation, began somewhat to repent having rushed so precipitately into the lion's den.

"Luke Bradley!" exclaimed Palmer, stepping forward.

"Luke Bradley!" echoed Lady Rookwood, recoiling and staring into his face.

"Fear nothing, Madam," cried Luke. "I am here to assist you—I will defend you with my life."

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* Cloap knife.

"Even I," cried Luke; "strange as it may sound."

"Holy powers protect me!" ejaculated Titus. "As I live, it is Sir Piers himself."

"Sir Piers!" echoed Coates, catching the infection of terror, as he perceived Palmer more distinctly. "What! is the dead come to life again?—a ghost—a ghost?"

"A ghost!" echoed Titus. "By my *soul*, it's the first ghost I ever heard of, that committed a burglary on its own house, and the night of the body's burial too. But what the devil are these with it? may be they're ghosts likewise."

"They are," said Palmer, in a hollow tone, mimicking the voice of Sir Piers, "attendant spirits. We are come for this woman—her time is out—so no more palavering, Titus, but lend a hand to take her to the church-yard, and be d—d to you."

"Upon my conscience, Mr. Coates," cried Titus, "it's either the devil, or Sir Piers. We'll be only in the way here. He's only just settling his old scores with his Lady. I thought it would come to this, long ago."

Jack took advantage of the momentary confusion, created by this incidental alarm at his disguise, to direct Rust towards the door by which the new comers had entered; and, this being accomplished, he burst into a loud laugh.

"What! not know me," cried he—"not know your old friend with a new face, Luke? nor you, Titus? nor you, who can see through a millstone, Lawyer Coates, don't you recognise —?"

"Jack Palmer, as I'm a sinner," cried Titus. "By the powers, and so it is. Why, Jack, honey, what does this mane! Is it yourself I see in such company? You're not robbing in earnest!"

"Indeed but I am, friend Titus," exclaimed Jack; "and it's my own self you see. I just took the liberty of borrowing Sir Piers's old hunting coat from the justice room. You said my toggery wouldn't do for the funeral. I'm no other than plain Jack Palmer, after all."

"With half a dozen aliases at your back, I dare say," cried Coates. "I suspected you all along—all your praise of highwaymen was not lost upon me. No, no—I can see into a millstone, be it ever so thick."

"Well;" replied Jack—"I'm sorry to see you here, friend Titus; but keep quiet, and you shall come to no harm. As to you, Luke Bradley, you have anticipated my intention by half an hour; I meant to set you free. For you, Mr. Coates, you may commit all future care of your affairs to your executors, administrators, and assigns. You will have no farther need to trouble yourself with worldly concerns," levelling a pistol at the Attorney, who, however, shielded himself, in an ecstasy of

apprehension, behind Luke's person. "Stand aside, Luke," said Jack.

"I stir not," replied Luke. "I thank you for your good intention, and will not injure you—that is, if you force me not to do so. I am here to defend her Ladyship."

"What's that you say?" returned Jack, in surprise—"defend her Ladyship?"

"With my life," replied Luke. "Let me counsel you to depart."

"Are you mad? Defend *her*—Lady Rookwood—your enemy—who would hang you? Tut, tut! Stand aside, I say, Luke Bradley, or look well to yourself."

"You had better consider well, ere you proceed," said Luke. "You know me of old—I have taken odds as great, and not come off the vanquished."

"The odds are even," cried Titus, "if Mr. Coates will but show fight—I'll stand by you to the last, my dear joy—you're the right son of your father, though on the wrong side. Ooh Jack Palmer, my jewel, no wonder you drank to the memory of Redmond O'Hanlon."

"You hear this?" cried Luke.

"Hot-headed fool!" muttered Jack.

"Why don't you shoot the mad cull on the spot, and be d—d to him!" said Dick Wilder.

"And mar my own chance?" thought Jack; "no, that will never do—his life is not to be thrown away. Be quiet," said he, in a whisper, to Wilder; "I've another card to play, which shall serve us better than all the plunder here. No harm must come to that youngster—his life is worth thousands to us." Then turning to Luke, he continued, "I'm loth to hurt you, but what can I do?—you must have the worst of it if we come to a pitched battle. I therefore advise you, as a friend, to draw off your forces. We are three to three; but two of *your* party are unarmed."

"Unarmed!" interrupted Titus, "Devil burn me, but this iron shillelah shall convince you to the contrary, Jack, or any of your friends."

"Make ready then, my lads," cried Jack.

"Stop a minute," exclaimed Coates; "this gets serious—this will end in homicide—in murder—we shall have all our throats cut, to a certainty; and though they will as surely be hanged for it, that will be but poor satisfaction to the sufferers. Had we not better compromise this matter?"

"Be silent!" said Luke.

"I'm for fighting it out," said Titus, whisking the poker round his head, like a flail in action; "my blood's up. Come on, Jack Palmer, I'm for you."

"I should vote for retreating," chattered the Attorney, "if that cursed fellow had not placed a *ne exeat* at the door."

"Give the word, captain," cried Rust, impatiently.

"Ay—ay," echoed Wilder.

"A skilful general always parleys," said Jack. "A word in your ear, Luke, ere that be done which cannot be undone."

"You mean me no treachery?" returned Luke.

"Treachery!" exclaimed Jack, disdainfully, uncocking his pistols, and putting them into his pocket.

"Shoot him as he advances," whispered Coates; "he is in your power now."

"Scoundrel!" replied Luke, "do you think me as base as yourself?"

"Hush, hush! for God's sake don't expose me," said Coates.

"Curse me if I know what all this means," muttered Wilder; "but if he don't finish the matter quickly, I'm d—d if I don't take the settling of it into my own hands."

Lady Rookwood had apparently listened to this singular conference with sullen composure, though in reality she was racked with anxiety as to its results; and, now apprehending that Palmer was about to make an immediate disclosure to Luke, she accented him as he passed her.

"Unbind me!" cried she, "and what you wish shall be your's—money—jewels——"

"Ha! may I depend?"

"I pledge my word."

Palmer untied the cord, and Lady Rookwood, approaching a table whereon stood the escritoir, touched a spring, and a secret drawer flew open.

"Do you this of your own free will?" asked Luke. "Speak, if it be otherwise."

"I do," returned the Lady, hastily.

Palmer's eyes glistened at the treasures exposed to his view.

"They are jewels, of countless price. Take them—and rid me," she added, in a whisper, "of *him*."

"Luke Bradley?"

"Ay."

"Give them to me."

"They are thine, freely, on those terms."

"You hear that, Luke," cried he aloud; "you hear it, Titus—this is no robbery. Mr. Coates—'Know all men by these presents,'—I call you to witness, Lady Rookwood gives me these pretty things."

"I do," returned she; adding, in a whisper, "on the terms which I proposed."

"Must it be done at once?"

"Without an instant's delay."

"Before your own eyes?"

"I fear not to look on—each moment is precious—you need but draw the trigger—he is off his guard now—you do it, you know, in self-defence."

"And you?"

"For the same cause."

"Yet he came here to aid you?"

"What of that?"

"He would have risked his life for yours?"

"I cannot pay back the obligation. He must die!"

"The document?"

"Will be useless then."

"Will not that suffice?—why aim at life?"

"You trifle with me. You fear to do it."

"*Fear!*"

"About it, then—you shall have more gold."

"I will about it," cried Jack, throwing the casket to Wilder, and seizing both Lady Rookwood's hands.—"I am no Italian bravo, Madam—no assassin—no remorseless cut-throat. What are you—devil or woman, that ask me to do this? Luke Bradley, I say."

"Would you betray me?" cried Lady Rookwood.

"You have betrayed yourself, Madam.—Nay, nay, Luke, hands off. See, Lady Rookwood, how you would treat a friend. This strange fellow, here, would blow out my brains for laying a finger upon your Ladyship."

"I will suffer no injury to be done to her," said Luke; "release her."

"Your Ladyship hears him," said Jack. "And you, Luke, shall learn the value set upon your generosity. You will not have *her* injured. This instant she hath proposed, nay, paid for *your* assassination."

"How?" exclaimed Luke, recoiling.

"A lie as black as hell," cried Lady Rookwood.

"A truth as clear as heaven," returned Jack: "I will speedily convince you of the fact."—Then turning to Lady Rookwood, he whispered—"Shall I give him the marriage document?"

"Beware!" said Lady Rookwood.

"Do I avouch the truth, then?"

She was silent.

"I am answered," said Luke.

"Then leave her to her fate," cried Jack.

"No," replied Luke; "she is still a woman, and I will not abandon her to ruffianly violence. Set her free."

"You are a fool," said Jack.

"Hurrah, hurrah!" cried Coates, who had rushed to the window—"Rescue, rescue!—they are returning from the church—I see the torch-light in the avenue—we are saved!"

"Hell and the devil!" cried Jack, "not an instant is to be lost. He alive, lads—bring off all the plunder you can—be handy!"

"Lady Rookwood, I bid you farewell," said Luke, in a tone in which scorn and sorrow were blended. "We shall meet again."

"We have not parted yet," returned she; "will you let this man pass? A thousand pounds for his life."

"Upon the nail!" cried Rust.

"By the living God, if any of you attempt to touch him, I will blow out his brains, be he friend or foe," cried Jack. "Luke Bradley, we shall meet again. You shall hear from me."

"Lady Rookwood," said Luke, as he departed, "I shall not forget this night."

"Is all ready?" asked Palmer, of his comrades.

"All."

"Then budge."

"Stay," said Lady Rookwood, in a whisper to him. "What will purchase that document?"

"Hem."

"A thousand pounds?"

"Double it."

"It *shall* be doubled."

"I will turn it over."

"Resolve me now."

"You shall hear from me."

"In what manner?"

"I will find speedy means."

"Your name is Palmer?"

"Palmer is the name he goes by, your Ladyship," replied Coates; "but it is a fashion with these rascals to have an alias."

"Ha—ha!" exclaimed Jack, thrusting the ramrod into his pistol barrel, as if to ascertain there was a ball within it; "are you there, Mr. Coates!—Pay your wager, Sir."

"What wager?"

"The hundred we bet, that you would take me, if ever you had the chance."

"Take *you*—it was Dick Turpin I betted to take."

"I am DICK TURPIN—Jack Palmer's my alias, replied he."

"Dick Turpin! then I'll have a snap at you, at all hazards," cried Coates, springing suddenly towards him.

"And I at you," said Turpin, discharging his pistol right in the face of the rash Attorney—"there's a quittance in full."

BOOK III.

The Gipsy.

Lay a garland on my hearse,
Of the dismal yew ;
Maidens, willow branches bear,—
Say I died true.
My love was false, but I was firm
From my hour of birth ;
Upon my buried body lie
Lightly, gentle earth !

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

and rushed upon the foremost so unexpectedly, that before the man could seize her, which he endeavoured to do, she snatched a pistol from his hand, and presented it at his head with a fierceness of aspect, like that of a tigress at bay—her eye wandering from one to the other of the group, as if selecting a mark.

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* Clasp knife.

On quitting Lady Rookwood's chamber, Luke speeded along the gloomy corridor, descending the spiral stairs, and, swiftly traversing sundry other dark passages, issued from a door at the back of the house. Day was just beginning to break. His first object had been to furnish himself with means to expedite his flight; and perceiving no one in the yard, he directed his hasty steps towards the stable. The door of the building was fortunately unfastened; and, entering, he found a strong roan-coloured horse, which he knew, from description, had been his father's favourite hunter, and to the use of which, he now considered himself fully entitled. The animal reared himself as he approached, shook his glossy coat, and neighed as if he recognized the footsteps and the voice that addressed him.

"Thou art mistaken, old fellow," said Luke; "I am not he thou thinkest; nevertheless I am glad thy instinct would have it so. If thou bearest my father's son as thou hast borne my father, o'er many a field for many a day, he need not fear the best mounted of his pursuers. So ho! come hither, Rook."

The noble steed turned at the call. Luke hastily equipped him, and vaulted upon his back, and, disregarding every impediment in the shape of fence or ditch, that he might avoid encountering any one returning from the church, shaped his course across the fields towards the Sexton's cottage, which he reached just as its owner was in the act of unlocking his door. Peter testified his delight and surprise at the escape of his grandson, by a greeting of his wonted chuckling laughter.

"Ha, ha!—free—escaped!" exclaimed he.—"Who hath delivered thee from the hands of the Moabites?—Who hath holpen thee from the hammer of Jael?—Hadst thou not reason, like Holofernes, to fear the sword of Judith? Ha, ha! But why do I ask? Who could have done this, but he that calleth himself Palmer? I was plotting some scheme of tardy deliverance, and lo! he hath done it at once."

"My own hands have set me free," returned Luke. "I am indebted to no man for my liberty—still less to him. But I cannot tarry here; each moment is precious. I came hither, to request of you to bear me company to the gipsy encampment. Your presence is needful—will be most useful. In a word, will you go, or not?"

"And mount behind thee?" replied Peter; "I like not the conveyance."

"Farewell, then;" and Luke turned to depart.

"Stay: this is Sir Piers' horse, old Rook; I care not if I ride him."

"Quick then—mount."

"I will not delay thee ten seconds," rejoined the Sexton, opening his door, and throwing his implements in the cottage.

"Back, Mole—back, Sir," cried he, as the dog rushed out to greet him. "Bring your steed nigh this stone, grandson Luke—there—a little nearer—all's right," and away they galloped.

The Sexton's first inquiries were directed to ascertain how Luke had accomplished his escape; and, having satisfied himself in this particular, he was content to remain silent; musing, it might be, on the incidents which had been detailed to him.

The road Luke chose, was a rough unfrequented lane, which skirted, for nearly a mile, the moss-grown palings and thick plantations of the park. It then diverged to the right, and seemed to bear towards a range of hills rising in the distance. High hedges impeded the view on either hand; but there were occasional gaps, affording glimpses here and there of the tract of country through which he was riding. Meadows were seen steaming with heavy dews, intersected by a deep channelled stream, whose course was marked by a hanging cloud of vapour, as well as by certain low, melancholy, pollard-willows, that stood like stripped, shivering urchins by the river-side. Other fields succeeded, yellow with golden grain, or bright with flowering clover (the autumnal crop), coloured with every shade, from the light green of the turnip to the darker verdure of the bean, the various products of the teeming land. The whole was backed by round drowsy masses of trees.

Luke spake not, nor abated his furious course, till the road began to climb a steep ascent. He then drew in the rein, and from the heights of the acclivity stayed to survey the plain over which he had passed.

It was a rich agricultural district, with little of the picturesque, but having much of true English endearing beauty and loveliness to recommend it. Such a quiet, pleasing landscape, in short, as one views, at such a season of the year, from every eminence in every midland county of our merry isle. The picture was made up chiefly of a tract of land, as we have just described, filled with corn ripe for the sickle, or studded with sheaves of the same golden produce, enlivened with green meadows, so deeply luxuriant as to claim the scythe for the second time; each divided from the other by thick hedge-rows, the uniformity of which were broken ever and anon by some towering elm, or wide branching oak. Many old farm houses, with their broad barns and crowd of haystacks (forming little villages in themselves), ornamented the landscape at different points, and by their substantial look, gave evidence of the fertility of the soil, and of the thriving condition of its inhabitants. Some three miles distant might be seen the scattered hamlet of Rookwood; the dark russet thatch of its houses scarce perceptible amongst the embrowned foliage of the sur-

rounding timber. The site of the village was, however, pointed out by the square tower of the antique church, which crested the summit of the adjoining hill; and although the Hall was entirely hidden from view, Luke readily traced out its locality, amidst the depths of the dark grove in which it was embedded.

This goodly prospect had other claims to attention in Luke's eyes besides its agricultural or pictorial merit. It was, or he deemed it was, his own; for far as his eye ranged, yes, even beyond the line of vision, the estates of Rookwood extended.

"Dost see yon house below us, in the valley?" asked Peter, of his companion.

"I do," replied Luke; "a snug old house—a model of a farm—everything looks comfortable and well to do about it—there are a dozen lusty haystacks, or thereabouts; and the great barn, with its roof yellowed like gold, looks built for a granary; and there are stables and kine-houses, and orchards, and dove-cots, and fish ponds, and an old circular garden, with wall-fruit in abundance. He should be a happy man, and a wealthy one, who dwells therein. 'Tis a joyous thing," continued he, "thus to scour the country at earliest dawn—to catch all the spirit and freshness of the morning—to be abroad before the lazy world is half awake—to make the most of brief existence—and to have spent a day of keen enjoyment, almost before the day begins with some; of such enjoyment as he never can know who, chained by the fetters of sleep, only issues forth when the sun is high in heaven. I like to anticipate the rising of the glorious luminary—to watch every line of light changing, as at this moment, from shuddering grey to fervent blushing rose! See how the heavens are dyed! Who would exchange yon gorgeous spectacle," continued Luke, pointing towards the East, and again urging his horse to full speed down the hill, endangering the Sexton's seat, and threatening to impale him upon the crupper of the saddle, "who would exchange that sight, and the exhilarating feeling of this fresh morn', for a couch of eider down, and a headache in reversion?"

"I for one," returned the Sexton, sharply, "would willingly exchange it for that or any other couch, provided it rid me of this accursed crupper, which galleth me sorely. Moderate thy pace, grandson Luke, or I must throw myself off the horse, in self-defence."

Luke slackened his charger's pace, in compliance with the Sexton's wish.

"Ah—well," continued Peter, restored in a measure to comfort; "now I can contemplate the sunrise, which thou laudest, somewhat at mine ease. 'Tis a fine sight, I doubt not, to the

eyes of youth; and, to the sanguine soul of him upon whom life itself is dawning, is, I dare say, inspiriting: but when the hey-day of existence is past—when the blood flows sluggishly in the veins—when one has known the desolating storms which the brightest sunrise has preceded, the seared heart refuses to trust its false glitter; and, like the experienced sailor, sees oft in the brightest skies a forecast of the tempest. To such a one, there can be no new dawn of the heart—no sun can gild its cold and cheerless horizon—no breeze revive pulses that have long since ceased to throb with any chance emotion. Even such am I,—I am too old to feel freshness in this nipping air! it chills me more than the damps of night, to which I am accustomed. Night—midnight, is my season of delight. Nature is instinct then with secrets dark and dread; there is a language which he who sleepeth not, but will wake, and watch, may haply learn. Strange organs of speech hath the Invisible World—strange language doth it talk—strange communion hold with him who would pry into its mysteries. It talks by bat and owl—by the grave-worm, and by each crawling thing—by the dust of graves, as well as by those that rot therein—but ever doth it discourse by night, and 'specially when the moon is at the full. 'Tis the lore that I have then learnt, that makes that season dear to me. Like your cat, mine eye expands in darkness—I blink at the sunshine, like your owl."

"Cease this forbidding strain," returned Luke; "it sounds as harshly as thy own screech-owl's cry. Let thy thoughts take a more sprightly turn, more in unison with my own and with the fair aspect of nature."

"Shall I direct them to the gipsies' camp, then?" said Peter, with a sneer. "Do thine own thoughts tend thither?"

"Thou art not altogether in the wrong," replied Luke; "I *was* thinking of the gipsies' camp, and of one who dwells amongst its tents."

"I knew it," replied Peter. "Didst thou think to deceive me, by attributing all thy joyousness of heart to the dawn? Thy thoughts have been wandering all this while upon one who hath, I will engage, a pair of sloe-black eyes, an olive skin, and yet withal a clear one—black, yet comely, 'as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon'—a mesh of jetty hair, that hath entangled thee in its net-work—ripe lips, and a cunning tongue—one of the plagues of Egypt.—Ha, ha!"

"Thou hast guessed shrewdly," replied Luke. "I care not to own to thee that my thoughts were so occupied."

"I was assured of it," replied the Sexton. "And what may be the name of her towards whom thy imagination was straying?"

"She is one of the tribe of Lovel, on the mother's side."

"Of the tribe of Lovel?" echoed Peter.

"Grandchild of that Barbara Lovel, whom thou sayest performed the rites of embalment on my mother's remains."

"Her grandchild!—How is she called?"

"Sibila Perez," replied Luke. "Her father was a Spanish Gitano. She is known amongst her people by her mother's name of Lovel."

"Beautiful, no doubt?"

"She is beautiful," replied Luke; "how beautiful thou shalt judge presently."

"I will take your word for it," returned the Sexton; "and you love her, doubtlessly?"

"Passionately."

"You have loved her long?"

"Years."

"You are not married?" asked Peter, hastily.

"Not as yet," replied Luke; "but my faith is plighted. I will raise her to my state."

"To your state!" echoed the Sexton, in a tone of deep scorn.

"Ha, ha!—What would then be your state? Marry in madness, as your father did before you, and then *cut through* the knot you cannot otherwise untie. You are a Rookwood, and I say to you 'beware.'—Again I tell you, you must abandon this wench."

"And break her heart?"

"Women's hearts are not so readily broken: the stuff is suppler than thou deemest. But grant it should be so, it were better for thee she should perish now than hereafter."

"For what dost thou take me?—What evil thing art thou?" cried Luke, reining in his steed, and regarding him with a look of horror and disgust, not unmixed with apprehension.

"Thy grandsire—thy counsellor—thy friend," returned Peter, with a sinister smile. "Thou art, I have already said, a Rookwood, and as such I offer thee advice grounded on experience, which thou wilt do well not to reject. Thy father I knew; thy father's father, and others of thy family; and with the annals of all thy race am I acquainted. Thy father's son I also know, and I tell thee, Luke, there are seeds of pride in thy composition, which will grow up in as short a space as grains of mustard to towering trees. Once Sir Luke Rookwood in possession, and mark the change! Impulses that now but feebly sway thy character, may then determinately affect it, and pride amongst the foremost.—Even now, methinks, I discern some difference in thee, of which thou thyself can scarce be unconscious. Be advised by me in this matter: approve thyself first, ere thou art fully committed. 'Tis for her sake I speak."

"For *her* sake!" echoed Luke, disdainfully.

"Ay, for her sake. Better she be the jilted mistress than the despised wife; for thou wouldst hate her *then* in the proportion that thou lovest her *now*. She would be a bar to thy honourable advancement in the world—a blot in thy splendour abroad—a bane to thy happiness at home. Thou art a Rookwood—thou art yet untried—thou hast not passed through the fiery furnace—through the terrible ordeal of matrimony—thou knowest not the fuel that lies ready to be kindled at thy heart. With thee to marry Sybil will be to repent—to repent, to loath—to loath, to—"

"Peace," thundered Luke, "or by heaven I will throw thee beneath my horse's hoofs."

"And destroy one who boldly speaks what another would hesitate to avouch? 'Tis thus well-meant advice is ever treated. Had I counselled thee to wed her, thou wouldst have accounted me thy friend; but because I point out the only course thou couldst with honour or with safety pursue, thou wouldst trample me beneath thine horse's heels. Why should I be silent, when I may work great good by open speech? Am I not more nearly interested in thy welfare than any other? Am I influenced by any sordid feeling? Am I not entitled, as a sufferer by an alliance equally disproportionate and wretched, as thou knowest, to exclaim against this? pursue it, I tell thee, and thou wilt repent it.—Hast thou no other liking?"

"None."

"Didst thou never love another?"

"Mine is no wandering heart. Where it liketh, it abideth."

"By what troth were ye betrothed together?"

"By the true troth of hearts that before heaven pledge themselves each to the other."

"Be it so then, and may the heaven that hath registered your vow, bless your nuptials."

"Is that thy wish?"

"If it must be so. I would have thee wedded, though not to Sybil."

"And whom wouldst thou select?"

"One before whom her beauty would pale as stars at day's approach."

"There lives not such a one."

"Trust me, there does—Eleanor Mowbray is lovely beyond parallel. But I was merely speculating upon a possibility, when I wished her thine—it is scarcely likely she would cast her eyes upon thee."

"I shall not heed her neglect. Yet, graced with my title, I doubt not, were it my pleasure to seek a bride amongst those of gentle blood, I should not find all indifferent to my suit."

"Possibly not. But what might weigh with others, would

not weigh with her. There are qualities thou lackest, which she has discovered in another."

"In whom?"

"In Ranulph Rookwood."

"Is he her suitor?"

"I know not; but I have found out the secret of her heart."

"And thou wouldst have me abandon my own betrothed love, to beguile from my brother his destined bride?"

The sexton answered not, and Luke fancied he could perceive a quivering in the hands that grasped his body for support. There was a brief pause in their conversation.

"And who is Eleanor Mowbray?" asked Luke, breaking the silence.

"Thy cousin. On the mother's side a Rookwood. 'Tis therefore I would urge thy union with her. There is a prophecy relating to thy house, which seems as though it would be fulfilled in thy person and in hers.

When the stray Rook shall perch on the topmost bough,
There shall be screeching and screaming I trow;
But of right, and of rule, of the ancient nest,
The Rook that with Rook mates shall hold him possess.

The stray Rook is thyself—that I need not tell. The Rook that with the Rook shall mate, may be Ranulph. He may wed Eleanor Mowbray, and the estates shall pass away from thy hands."

"I place no faith on such fantasies," replied Luke; "and yet the lines bear strangely upon my present situation."

"Their application to thyself," returned the Sexton, "and to her is unquestionable and precise."

"It would seem so, indeed," rejoined Luke, and he sank into abstraction, from which the Sexton for some space did not care to arouse him.

Peter had judged his grandson truly. A change was at work within him, some intimation of which Luke had himself experienced, but he knew not its extent, until probed by the Sexton's reckless hand. He became suddenly alive to the painful conviction, and started at the sight of the precipice to which he was hastening with headlong speed. He felt he could not retreat; and yet that leap, once taken, he feared his peace of mind was gone. He had not dared to think of Sybil, except in moments of extreme peril, when hope for a while was clouded. Then it was that her image cheered him. Now that his prospects were again fair, she stood like an obstacle in his path. He reproached himself for this dereliction—he sought in vain to arouse his bitter feelings. His passion was

ardent as ever; but he was not engrossed, as heretofore, by that passion. Pride struggled for mastery with love, and in the end might, he feared, obtain the victory. When a suspicion of his mistress's inferiority once enters the lover's mind, his passion, we may rest assured, is on the wane. Love, like death, is a leveller to all distinctions: it will admit of none—will perceive none; and when affection and worldly degree are put in comparison by the lover himself, it is not difficult to foretell by which the scales will be turned.

——— Love's kingdom is founded
Upon a parity; lord and subject,
Master and servant, are names banished thence.
They wear one fetter all, or all one freedom.*

Annoyed with himself, and angry at the unexpected insight into his own heart, which had been afforded him, Luke began to regret that he had ever sought out his grandsire as a companion of his journey, and wished him safely back at his own cottage. He was in no mood tranquilly to endure the further persecution which the Sexton intended him.

"One question more, and I have done" exclaimed Peter, abruptly renewing the conversation.

"What wouldst thou ask? To whom relates thy question?"

"To Sybil."

"Name her not—thou dost it but to torture me."

"You answer me," persisted Peter. "Thou hast loved her long, thou sayest. With thee to love must be to love madly, desperately. With her, being of gipsy blood, commingled with the fiery current which she deriveth from her Spanish parentage, love can be no tame regard."

"Tame regard!" echoed Luke. "She is the daughter of a wild race, who love with an ardour which those who dwell in cities can never equal. Love with them is an intense passion."

"And, like the prophet's rod, swalloweth up all lesser emotions—as pride, revenge, remorse. That is not thy case, Luke. No matter; she loved thee passionately—you have wandered together for years. Could hearts so framed for each other, endure the torture of unrequited love for such a period? With inclination to prompt—opportunity to grant—it were unreasonable to suppose otherwise! She is not of a chilly race, thou sayest?"

"What mean you to insinuate?"

"Nay, I make all allowances."

"Allowances!"

* Cartwright.

"Youth, blood, passion, all conspiring, it is not to be marvelled at."

"Darest thou to hint——"

"That she is thy mistress—wherefore not? Things more improbable have come to pass. I hold the offence too lightly, to blame thee for it."

"I warn thee to be silent."

"Canst thou deny it?"

"My hand is upon thy throat," exclaimed Luke, furiously seizing his grandsire by the collar.

"To answer my question, were better than to use violence," returned Peter.

"Listen to me, then," replied Luke, withdrawing his hold, and with difficulty restraining his indignation; "thou who scoffest at woman's love, and holdest her chastity in derision, and learn that, placed by circumstances in a situation of doubt and peril—surrounded by wild and lawless companions—loving with an ardour and devotion passionate and fervent as ever agitated the bosom of woman—the fame of Sybil is as pure as mountain snow. Since boyhood have I known her—since boyhood loved her. Ah! well do I remember when I saw her first; well do I recall the memory of that moment. She stands before me as she stood a child. A fairy creature, cast in beauty's mould, with glowing cheeks, radiant with warmth and bloom—that rich bloom that paints the cheek of the brunette—eyes large, and dark, and full of fire and tenderness—lips vivid as carnation; and even then, with rich tresses that fell to her little rounded ancles! I know not how soon my love burst into raging flame, but the spark was kindled then. Thou knowest that I, an infant, was committed to the care of Barbara Lovel. She brought me up as one of her own children. While I was yet a boy, Sybil returned with her dying mother from Toledo. Her father had been a gipsy contrabandist; he was shot by the carabineers in the sierras in the neighbourhood of that city. Her mother had suffered a martyrdom at the Inquisition, chiefly for her daughter's sake. She died soon after her return to this country. The care of Sybil consequently devolved on Barbara. She, as thou art aware, rules the gipsy people as their queen. Her power and influence extended to Sybil and myself. We lived apart from the others, yet I was not altogether estranged. Many a wild adventure have I engaged in with the company—many a merry feat performed. But let that pass. As Sybil grew in years, she grew in beauty. Her eyes caught new fire from the sun; her cheeks a warmer glow; her locks a jettier dye; her lips a richer carnation. My love grew in proportion. Heavens! and what a love was mine—~~was~~—ah!—~~thou~~ smilest and I sigh—accursed be that smile—and yet I know not why I sigh. It is not as it was wont to be. There is more of sad-

ness than of ecstasy in thus hurriedly retracing those bright and happy hours. Surely I am not, cannot be, the monster thou wouldst have me think myself. That vision of bliss rises before me like a Paradise, from which I am self-exiled. Renounce Sybil! never, never. Away with thy accursed advice."

The Sexton answered not for some space; when he did, it was in a tone of cold irony.

"Advice," said he, "is always disagreeable; I never take it; seldom give it. If I esteemed you as lightly as I esteem all else; or rather, if I hated you as I hate all else, I would urge you to this match—I would bid you brave all customs—set all laws of society at nought, and despise them as they ought to be despised; (not that you could despise them, for your proud man, let him think what he will; breathes but the breath of others—is a shackled slave to other's opinions—and thou art already, or will be, a proud man, and then thou wilt no longer see with thine own eyes, or judge with thine own judgment); I would bid you do this, I tell you frankly, because it would be to make you miserable; and think not hence, that I delight in misery, or am jealous of happiness. It is not so. But when I see folly lifting its hand against itself, or driving its mad chariot at headlong speed, my hand shall never stay the blow, or put a spoke in the wheel. In such case my counsel would be, that thou shouldst wed Sybil. She is young—she is beautiful, I should say, and fair, I doubt not in thine eyes, though dark as an Ethiop in those of others. She will grace thy board. She will adorn thy name. The gipsy bride of Sir Luke Rookwood—there is romance in the title—and what needest thou to care, if high dames should say, that she lacks accomplishment, or breeding, education, all that is supposed to refine their sex? What if they, titled as they would be, were to shun her? thou needest not care for that. Avoid the society of women, and seek that of men: there are many, I doubt not, who would see no mote in thy wife's bright black eyes—no stain in her sunburnt cheek."

"What fiend could have prompted me to link myself with a companion so pestilent?" muttered Luke; but, thank heaven, 'tis only for a short space."

"True," replied the Sexton, "and thou mayest profit by thy present affliction, if thou wilt, and turn this necessary evil to excellent account. Even I, you see, can moralize. Your present situation applieth forcibly to your future condition. Unwittingly you have saddled yourself with a troublesome companion, who sticketh to you like a burr, and whom you cannot shake off. There is, however, one drop of comfort in the cup—the journey, luckily, is short. Marry—and you will have

a companion through the journey of life, equally, it may be, wearisome, undoubtedly as difficult to be disposed of."

Infuriated, as his own steed might have been by the sting of a summer hornet, and yet unable to free himself from his inexorable tormentor, Luke, as the animal would probably have done, sought refuge in flight, forcing his horse into its swiftest gallop; and though he still carried the galling cause of his disquietude along with him, he, by this means, effectually disarmed his pertinacity; as in fact, Peter's sole attention was now directed to the maintenance of his seat, which every instant, owing to the nature of the road, became more precarious.

The aspect of the country had materially changed since their descent of the hill. In place of the richly-cultivated district which lay on the other side, a broad brown tract of waste land was spread out before them, covered with scattered patches of gorse, stunted fern, and low brushwood, presenting an unvaried surface of unbaked turf, whose shallow coat of sod was manifested by the stones that clattered under the horse's hoofs as he rapidly traversed its arid breast, clearing with ease to himself, but not without creating alarm to the Sexton—every gravelly trench, natural chasm, or other inequality of ground that occurred in his course. Clinging to his grandson with the tenacity of a bird of prey fixing its talons in the sides of its quarry, Peter for some time kept his station in security; but, unluckily, at one dyke rather wider than the rest, the horse, owing possibly to the mismanagement, intentional or otherwise, of its rider, swerved, and the Sexton, dislodged from his "high estate," fell at the edge of the trench, and rolled incontinently to the bottom.

Luke drew up, to inquire if any bones were broken, and Peter presently upreared his dusty person from the abyss into which he had fallen. Without condescending any reply, yet muttering curses, "not loud, but deep," Peter accepted his grandson's proffered hand and remounted.

While thus occupied, Luke fancied he heard a distant shout, and noting whence the sound proceeded—the same quarter by which he had approached the heath—he beheld a single horseman, spurring in their direction, at the top of his speed; and to judge from the rate at which he advanced, it was evident he was anything but indifferently mounted. Apprehensive of pursuit, Luke expedited the Sexton's ascent; and that accomplished, without bestowing further regard upon the object of his solicitude, he resumed his headlong flight. He now, however, thought it necessary to bestow more attention to his choice of road, and, perfectly acquainted with the heath, avoided all unnecessarily hazardous passes; but in spite of his knowledge of the ground, and the excellence of his horse, the stranger sensibly gained upon him. The latter's steed carried

no double burthen, and was no lagging hack; fleet as the wind it seemed, swift as an Arab of the desert. The danger, however, was no longer imminent.

"We are safe," cried Luke; "the limits of Hardchase are past. In a few seconds we shall enter Davenham Wood. I will turn the horse loose, and we will betake ourselves to flight amongst the trees. I will show thee a place of concealment. He cannot follow us on horse-back, and on foot I defy him. He is but one man, 'tis true; but I would willingly avoid any encounter now, which, most probably, would terminate fatally."

"Stay," cried the Sexton. "He is not in pursuit—he takes another course—he wheels to the right. By heavens! it is the Devil himself upon a black horse, come for bowlegged Ben. See, he is there already."

The horseman had turned, as the Sexton stated, careering towards a revolting object, at some little distance on the right hand. It was a gibbet, with its horrible burthen. He rode swiftly towards it, and reining in his horse, took off his hat, bowing profoundly to the carcass that swung in the morning breeze. Just at that moment a gust of air catching the fleshless skeleton, its arms seemed to be waved in reply to the salutation. A solitary crow wheeled over the horseman's head as he paused. After a moment's halt, he turned round, and again shouted to Luke, waving his hat.

"As I live," said the latter, "it is Jack Palmer."

"Dick Turpin, you mean," rejoined the Sexton. "He has been paying his respects to a brother blade. Ha, ha! Dick will never have the honour of a gibbet; he is too tender of the knife. Did you mark the crow?—But here he comes."

And in another instant Turpin was by their side.

CHAPTER II.

I see a column of slow-rising smoke
O'ertop the lofty wood, that skirts the wild.

COWPER. THE TASK.

"THE top of the morning to you, gentlemen," said Turpin, (for so we must in future designate our friend, Jack Palmer,) as he rode up, at an easy canter. "Did you not hear my halloo? I caught a glimpse of you on the hill yonder,—I knew you both, two miles off; and so, having a word or two to say to you, Luke Bradley, before I leave this part of the country, I put Bess

to it, and she soon brought me within hail. Bless her black skin," added he, affectionately patting his horse's neck, "there's not her match in these parts, no, nor in any other; she wants no coaxing, to do her work—no bleeder for her. Often and often she's saved her master's colquarron* from being twisted! Black Bess is my best friend, my first favourite, and dearer to me than any Judy of them all, though I've no particular dislike to the women. But what blowen would do for me what she has done? No, no,—Black Bess before the world. I should have been up with you before this, had I not taken a cross cut, to look at poor Ben."

"The martyr!" ejaculated Peter.

"True, the martyr," echoed Jack, laughing: "many a man of less merit has met with canonization. Ben was a brave boy in his day. I like to see how long a man will last, under these circumstances. There was Will Davies, the Golden Farmer, who rattled merrily in his irons at Bagshot, for many a long year, I've heard say; and Holloway, who was gibbeted at Holloway, on the Highgate Road; and Jack Hawkins; and Ben Child (he who was tucked up for the Bristol mail job;) their bones are bleaching still; and Will the waterman, who was hung in irons at the Isle of Dogs, he stood it out for years—I remember him. I've seen some dozens in my day. Curse those crows—I hate the sight of them. Damme, if I don't shake my chains at 'em, if ever it's my lot to hang, like fruit, from the tree, and to dance a long lavolta to the music of the four whistling winds. No one shall pluck me with impunity,—Ha, ha! And now may I ask, whither are you bound, comrades?"

"Comrades!" whispered Peter to Luke; "you see *he* does not so easily forget his old friends."

"I have business which will not admit of delay," observed Luke; "and, to speak plainly—"

"You want not my society," returned Turpin; "I guessed as much. Natural enough! You have got an inkling of your good fortune. You have found out that you are a rich man's heir, not a poor wench's bastard. No offence. I'm a plain spoken man, as you will find, if you know it not already. I have no objection to your playing these fine tricks on others, though it won't answer your turn to do so with me."

"Sir!" exclaimed Luke, sharply.

"Sir, to you," replied Turpin. "Sir Luke—as I suppose you would now like to be addressed. I am aware of all. A nod is as good as a wink to me. Last night I learnt the fact of Sir Piers' marriage from Lady Rookwood:—Ay, from her Ladyship. You stare,—and old Peter there, opens his eyes

* Neck.

now. But it was so—she let it all out by mistake; and I am in possession of what can alone substantiate your father's first marriage, and establish your claims."

"The devil!" cried the Sexton, adding, in a whisper to Luke, "you had better not be quite so precipitate in dropping so obliging an acquaintance."

"You are jesting," said Luke to Turpin.

"It is ill jesting before breakfast," returned Dick; "I'm seldom in the mood for a joke so early. What, if a certain marriage certificate had fallen into my hand?"

"A marriage certificate!" echoed Luke and the Sexton simultaneously.

"The only existing proof of the union of Sir Piers Rookwood with Susan Bradley," continued Turpin. "What if I had stumbled upon such a document—nay more, if I knew where to direct you to it?"

"Had you not better condescend to renew your former intimacy?" whispered Peter.

"Peace," cried Luke, to his tormentor; and then addressing Turpin, "if what you say be true," said he, "my quest is at an end. All that I need, you appear to possess. Other proofs are but secondary to this. I know with whom I have to deal. What do you demand?"

"I demand nothing," said Turpin. "We will talk about the matter after breakfast. I wish to treat with you as friend and friend. Meet me on those terms, and I am your man; reject my offer, and I will turn my mare's head, and ride back to Rookwood. With me now rests all your hopes. I have dealt fairly with you, and I expect to be fairly dealt with, in return. It were idle to say that now I have an opportunity I should not turn this luck to my advantage. I were a fool to do so. You cannot expect it. And then I have Rust and Wilder to settle with. I have left them behind, but they know my destination. We have been old associates. I like your spirit—I care not for your haughtiness:—but I will not help you up the ladder, to be kicked down afterwards. Now you understand me. Whither are you bound?"

"To Davenham Priory, the gipsy camp."

"The gipsies are your friends?"

"They are."

"I am alone."

"You are safe."

"You pledge your word that all shall be on the square. You will not mention to one of that canting crew what I have told you?"

"I cannot pledge myself to that—to one alone."

"To whom?"

"A woman."

"Bad! never trust a petticoat."

"I will answer for her with my life."

"And for your grand dad there?"

"He will answer for himself," said Peter. "You need not fear treachery in me. Honour among thieves, you know."

"Or where else should you seek it," returned Turpin, "for it has left all other classes of society. Your highwayman is your only man of honour. I will trust you both; and you shall find you may trust me. After breakfast, as I said before, we will bring the matter to a conclusion. Tip us your daddle, Sir Luke, and I am satisfied. You shall rule in Rookwood, I'll engage, ere a week be flown—and then—but so much parleying is dull work:—let's make the best of our way to breakfast."

And away they cantered.

A narrow bridle road conducted them singly through the defiles of a thick wood. Their route lay in the shade, and the air felt chilly amidst the trees, the sun not having attained sufficient altitude to penetrate its depths, while over-head all appeared warmth and light. Quivering on the tops of the timber, the horizontal sunbeams created, in their refraction, brilliant prismatic colourings, and filled the air with motes like golden dust. Our horsemen heeded not the sunshine nor the shade; occupied each with his own train of thought, they silently rode on.

Davenham Wood, through which they urged their course, had, in the olden time, been a forest of some extent. It was then an appendage to the domains of Rookwood, but had passed from the hands of that family to those of a wealthy adjoining land-owner and lawyer, Sir Edward Davenham, in the keeping of whose descendants it had ever after continued.

A noble wood it was, and numbered many patriarchal trees. Ancient oaks, whose broad gnarled limbs the storms of five hundred years had vainly striven to uproot, and which were sternly decaying,—gigantic beech-trees, whose silvery stems shot smoothly upwards, sustaining branches of such size, that each, dissevered, would in itself have formed a tree, populous with leaves, and variegated with rich autumnal tints—the sprightly sycamore—the dark chestnut—the weird wychelm—the majestic elm itself, festooned with ivy—every variety of wood, dark, dense, and closely interstrewn, composed the forest through which they rode. So multitudinous was the timber, so closely planted, so entirely filled up with a thick matted vegetation, which had been allowed to collect beneath, that little view was afforded, had any been desired by the present parties, into the labyrinth of the grove. Tree after tree, clad in the glowing livery of the season, was passed, and was as rapidly succeeded by others. Occasionally a bough pro-

jected over their path, compelling the riders to incline their heads, as they passed; but, heedless of such difficulties, Luke pressed on. Now the road grew lighter, and they became at once sensible of the genial influence of the sun. The transition was as agreeable as instantaneous. They had opened upon an extensive plantation of full grown pines, whose tall, branchless stems grew up like a forest of masts, and freely admitted the pleasant sunshine. Beneath those trees, the soil was sandy, and destitute of all undergrowth, though covered with brown hair-like fibres and dry cones, shed by the pines. The agile squirrel, that freest denizen of the grove, starting from the ground, as the horsemen galloped on, sprang up the nearest tree, and might be seen angrily gazing at the disturbers of his haunts, beating the branches with his fore-feet, in expression of displeasure; the rabbit darted across their path; the jays flew screaming amongst the foliage; the blue cushat, scared at the clatter of the horses' hoofs, sped on swift wing into quarters secure from their approach; while the party-coloured pies, like curious village gossips, congregated to peer at the strangers, expressing their astonishment by loud and continuous chattering.

Though so gentle of ascent as to be almost imperceptible, it was still evident that the path they were following gradually mounted a hill side; and when, at length, they reached an opening, the view thence showed the eminence they had insensibly won. Pausing for a moment on the brow of the hill, Luke pointed to a stream that wound through the valley, and, tracing its course, indicated a particular spot amongst some trees. There was no appearance of a dwelling-house—no cottage roof, no white canvass shed, to point out tents of the wandering tribe whose abode they were seeking; and the only circumstance which showed that it had once been the haunt of man, were a few gray monastic ruins scarce distinguishable from the stony barrier by which they were surrounded; and the only evidence that it was still frequented by human beings, was a thin column of pale blue smoke, which arose in wreaths from out the brake; the light-coloured vapour beautifully contrasting with the green umbrage from which it issued.

"Our destination is yonder," exclaimed Luke, pointing in the direction of the vapour.

"I am glad to hear it," cried Turpin, "as well as to perceive there is some one awake. The smoke holds out a prospect of breakfast. No smoke without fire, as old Lady Scanmag said, and I'll wager that that fire was not lighted for the fayter fellows* to count their fingers by. We shall find three sticks, and a black pot with a kid seething in it, I'll engage. These

gipsy fellows have picked out a prettyish spot to quarter in—quite picturesque, as one may say—and but for that bit of smoke, which looks for all the world like a Dutch Skipper blowing his morning cloud, and which might tell an awkwardish tale to any one but a friend, no one need know of their vicinity. A pretty place, upon my soul."

The spot, in sooth, merited Turpin's eulogium. It was, as he observed, "quite picturesque." The gem of the scene was a little secluded valley, in the midst of wooded hills, so secluded, indeed, that not a single habitation appeared in view, nor was there any further indication of their proximity than what we have described. Clothed with timber to the very summits, excepting upon the side whereon the party stood, which verged upon the declivity, these mountainous ridges presented a broken outline of foliage, variegated with masses of colour, of bright orange, umber, and deepest green. Four hills hemmed in the valley. Here and there a gray slab of rock might be discerned amongst the wood, and a mountain ash figured conspicuously upon a jutting crag immediately below them.

Deep sunken in the ravine, beneath where the horsemen had halted, concealed in part from their view by the wild herbage and dwarf shrubs, ran a range of precipitate rocks, severed, it would seem, by some diluvial convulsion, from the opposite mountain side, as a corresponding rift was there visible, in which the same dip of strata might be observed, together with certain ribbed cavities, matching huge bolts of rocks which had once locked these stony walls together. Washing this cliff, swept a clear stream, well known, and well regarded, as it waxed in width, by the honest brethren of the angle, who seldom, however, had tracked it to its rise amongst these hills. This stream found its way into the valley through a chasm far to the left, and rushed thundering down the mountain side, in a headlong cascade. The valley was approached in this direction from Rookwood by an unfrequented carriage road, which Luke had, from prudential reasons, avoided.

All seemed consecrated to silence—to solitude—to the hush of nature: yet was this quiet scene the chosen retreat of lawless depredators, and had erstwhile been the theatre of feudal oppression and priestly persecution. We have said that no habitation was visible; that no dwelling, tenanted by man, could be seen; but, following the spur of the most distant hill, some traces of a stone wall might be discovered; and, upon a natural platform of rock, stood a stern square tower, which had once been the donjon of the castle, the Lords of which had called the four hills their own. A watch-tower then had crowned each mountain crest, every vestige of which had, however, long since

disappeared. Sequestered in the vale below had also stood the Priory before alluded to (a Monastery of gray friars, of the Order of St. Francis), some part of whose venerable walls were still remaining; and if they had not reverted to the bat and owl, as is wont to be the fate of such fanes, their cloistered shrines were devoted to beings whose natures partook, in some measure, of the instincts of those creatures of the night—a people whose deeds were of darkness, and whose eyes shunned the light. Here the gipsies had pitched their tent; and though the place was often, in part, deserted by the vagrant horde, yet certain of the tribe, who had grown into years (over whom Barbara Lovel held queenly sway), made it their haunt, and were suffered, by the authorities of the neighbourhood, to remain there unmolested—a lenient piece of policy; which, in our infinite regard for the weal of the tawny tribe, we recommend to the adoption of other justices, and knights of the shire.

Bidding his grandsire have regard to his seat, Luke leaped a high bank; and, followed by Turpin, began to descend the hill. Peter, however, took care to provide for himself. The descent was so perilous, and the footing so insecure, that he chose rather to trust to such conveyance as nature had furnished him withal, than to hazard the breaking of his neck by any false step of the horse. He contrived, therefore, to slide off from behind, shaping his own course in a more secure direction. As he watched his companions in their bold descent down the hill along the ledge of rocks, he could not help admiring their daring courage. He who has wandered amidst the Alps, must often have had occasion to witness the wonderful sure-footedness of that mountain pilot, the mule. He must have remarked how, with tenacious hoof, he will claw the rock, and drag himself from one impending fragment to another, with perfect security to his rider—how he will breast the roaring currents of air, and stand unshrinking at the verge of almost unfathomable ravines. But it is not so with the horse; fleet on the plain, careful over rugged ground, he is timid and uncertain on the hill side, and the risk which was incurred by Luke and Turpin, in their descent of the almost perpendicular sides of the cliff, was tremendous. Peter watched them in their passage with some admiration, and with much contempt.

“He will break his neck, of a surety,” said he; “but what matters it? as well now as hereafter.”

So saying he approached the verge of the precipice, where he could see them more minutely.

The passage along which Luke rode had never before been traversed by horse's hoof. Cut in the rock, it presented a steep zigzag descent amongst the cliffs, without any defence for the foot traveller, except such as was afforded by a casual clinging shrub, and no protection whatever existed for a horse-

man; the possibility of any such attempting the passage not having, in all probability, entered into the calculation of those who framed it. Add to this, the steps were of such unequal heights, and withal so narrow, that little space was afforded the passenger aforesaid to place the sole of his foot, and the danger to the rider was proportionately increased.

"The devil!" cried Turpin, staring downwards; "is this the best road you have got?"

"You will find one more easy," replied Luke, "if you ride for a quarter of a mile down the wood, and then return by the brook side. You will find me at the Priory."

"No!" answered the Highwayman, "if you go, I go too. It shall never be said that Dick Turpin was afraid to follow, where another would lead. Proceed."

Luke gave his horse his head, and the animal slowly and steadily commenced the descent, fixing his fore-legs upon the steps, and drawing his hinder limbs carefully after him. Here it was that the lightness and steadiness of Turpin's mare was completely shown. No Alpine mule could have borne its rider with more apparent ease and safety. Turpin encouraged her by hand and word; but she needed it not. The Sexton saw them: and, tracking their giddy descent, he became more interested than he anticipated. His attention was suddenly drawn towards Luke.

"He is gone," cried Peter. "He falls—he sinks—my plans are all defeated—the last link is snapped. No," added he, recovering his wonted composure, "his end is not so fated."

Rook had missed his footing. He rolled stumbling down the precipice a few yards. His rider's fate seemed inevitable. His feet were entangled in the stirrup; he could not free himself. A birch tree, growing in a chink of the precipice, arrested his further fall. But for this timely aid all had been over. Here Luke was enabled to extricate himself from the stirrup, and to regain his feet; seizing the bridle, he dragged his faulty steed back again to the road.

"You have had a narrow escape by Jove," said Turpin, who had been thunderstruck with the whole proceeding. "Those d——d big cattle are always clumsy; devilish lucky it's no worse."

This difficulty was passed, only to be succeeded by another. It was now comparatively smooth travelling; but they had not as yet arrived in the valley, and it seemed to be Luke's object to take somewhat of a circuitous path. This, although he was unacquainted with the way, was so evident, that his companion could not help commenting upon it.

Luke evaded the question. "The crag is steep there," said he; "besides, to tell you the truth, I want to surprise them."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Dick. "Surprise them, eh? What a pity the birch tree was in the way; you would have done it properly then. Egad, here's another surprise."

Dick's last exclamation was caused by his having suddenly come upon a gully in the rock, through which dashed the cascade before alluded to. The road was good on either side; but the only bridge across the stream was a narrow plank, along which it was impossible for horses to pass.

"You must have been mad to have come this road," cried Turpin, gazing down into the roaring depths in which the waterfall raged, and measuring the distance of the pass with his eye. "So, so, Bess. Ay, look at it, wench. I'll be d——d, lad, if I think your horse will do it, and therefore turn him loose."

But Dick might as well have bidden the cataract to flow backwards. Luke struck his heels into his horse's sides. The steed galloped to the brink, snorted, and refused the leap.

"I told you so—he can't do it," said Turpin. "Well, if you are obstinate, a wilful man must have his way. Stand aside, while I try it for you." Patting Bess, he put her to the gallop. She cleared the gulf bravely, landing her rider safely upon the opposite rock.

"Now then," cried Turpin, "for the other side of the chasm."

Luke again urged his steed. Encouraged by what he had seen, this time the horse sprang across without hesitation. The next instant they were in the valley.

For some time they rode along the banks of the stream in silence. A sound at length caught the quick ears of the Highwayman.

"Hist," cried he, "some one sings. Do you hear it?"

"I do," replied Luke, his blood rushing to his cheek.

"And could give a guess at the singer, no doubt," said Turpin, with a knowing look. "Was it to hear yon woodlark that you nearly broke your own neck, and put mine in jeopardy?"

"Prithee be silent," whispered Luke.

"I am dumb," replied Turpin; "I like a sweet voice, as well as another."

Clear as the song of a bird, yet melancholy as the distant dole of a vesper bell, arose the sound of that sweet voice from the wood. A fragment of a Spanish Gipsy song it warbled: Luke knew it well. Thus ran the romance:—

LA GITANILLA.

By the Guadalquivir
Ere the sun be flown,

By that glorious river
 Sits a maid alone.
 Like the sun-set splendour
 Of that current bright,
 Shone her dark eyes, tender
 As its witching light;
 Like the ripple flowing,
 Tinged with purple sheen,
 Darkly, richly glowing,
 Is her warm cheek seen.
 'Tis the Gitanilla,
 By the stream doth linger,
 In the hope that eve
 Will her lover bring her.

See, the sun is sinking!
 All grows dim, and dies;
 See, the waves are drinking
 Glories of the skies.
 Day's last lustre playeth
 On that current dark;
 Yet no speck betrayeth
 His long looked-for bark.
 'Tis the hour of meeting!
 Nay,—the hour is past.
 Swift the time is fleeting!
 Fleeteth Hope as fast.
 Still the Gitanilla
 By the stream doth linger,
 In the hope that night
 Will her lover bring her.

The tender trembling of a guitar was heard in accompaniment of the ravishing melodist.

The song ceased.

"Where is the bird?" asked Turpin.

"Move on in silence, and you shall see," said Luke; and, keeping upon the turf, so that the horse's tread became inaudible, he presently arrived at a spot where, through the boughs, the object of his investigation could plainly be distinguished, though they themselves were concealed from view.

Upon a platform of rock, which rose to the height of the trees, nearly perpendicularly from the river's bed, appeared the figure of the Gipsy Maid. Her footstep rested on the extreme edge of the abrupt cliff, at whose base the water boiled in a deep whirlpool, and the bounding chamois could not have been more lightly poised. One small hand rested upon her guitar, the other pressed her brow. Braided hair, of the jettest dye

and sleekest texture, was twined around her brow, in endless twisted folds.

Rowled it was in many a curious fret,
Much like a rich and curious coronet,
Upon whose arches twenty cupids lay,
And were as tied, or loath to fly away.*

And so exuberant was this rarest feminine ornament, that, after encompassing her brow, it was passed behind, and hung down in long thick plaits, almost to her feet. Sparkling as the sunbeams which played upon her dark yet radiant features, were the large, black, oriental eyes of the maiden, and shaded with lashes long and silken. Hers was a Moorish countenance, in which the magnificence of the eyes eclipses the face, be it ever so beautiful (an effect which may be observed in many of the paintings of Murillo), and the lovely contour is scarce noticed in the gaze which those large, languid, luminous orbs attract. Such was Sybil. Her features were exquisite, yet you looked only at her eyes—they were the load-stars of her countenance. Her costume was singular, and partook, like herself, of other climes. Like the Andalusian dame, her choice of colour inclined towards black, as the material of most of her dress was of that sombre shade. A bodice of dark brodered velvet restrained her delicate bosom's swell; a rich girdle, from which depended a silver chain, sustaining a short poignard, bound her waist, around her slender throat was twined a costly kerchief; and the rest of her dress was calculated to display her *petite*, yet faultless figure, to the fullest advantage.

The attitude she at present assumed was a pensive one; unconscious that she was the object of regard. Raising her guitar, she essayed to touch the chords; she struck a few notes; she resumed her romance:—

Swift that stream flows on,
Swift the night is wearing,—
Yet she is not gone,
Though with heart despairing.

Her song died away—her hand was needed to brush off the tears, that were gathering in her large, dark eyes. At once her attitude was changed. The hare could not have started more suddenly from her form. She heard accents, well known, charming part of her unfinished melody:—

* BROWN'S *Pastorals*.

Dips an oar—plash—hark!
 Gently on the river;
 'Tis her lover's bark,
 On the Guadalquivir.
 Hark! a song she hears!
 Every note she snatches;
 As the singer nears,
 Her own name she catches.
 Now the Gitanilla
 Stays not by the water—
 For the midnight hour
 Hath her lover brought her.

It was her lover's voice. She caught the sound at once, and, starting as the roe would arouse herself at the hunter's approach, bounded down the crag, and ere he had finished the *refrain*, was by his side.

Flinging the bridle to Turpin, Luke sprang to her, and caught her in his arms. Disengaging herself from his ardent embrace, Sybil drew back, abashed at the sight of the Highwayman,

"Heed him not," said Luke, "it is a friend."

"He is welcome here then," replied Sybil. "But where have you tarried so long, dear Luke?" continued she, as they walked to a little distance from the Highwayman. "What hath detained you? Wearily, wearily, have passed the hours since you departed.—You bring good news?"

"Good news—my girl; so good that I falter even in the telling of it. You shall know all anon. But see, our friend yonder grows impatient. Are there any stirring? We must bestow a meal upon him, and that forthwith: he is one of those that brook not much delay."

"I came not to spoil a love meeting," said Turpin, who had good-humouredly witnessed the scene; "but in sober seriousness, if there is a stray capon to be met with in the tents of the Egyptians, I shall be glad to make his acquaintance. Methinks I scent a stew afar off."

"Follow me," said Sybil; "your wants shall be supplied."

"Stay," said Luke; "there is one other of our party, whose coming we must abide."

"He is here," said Sybil, observing the Sexton at a distance.

"Who is that old man?"

"My grandsire, Peter Bradley."

"Is that Peter Bradley?" asked Sybil.

"Ay, you may well ask the question," said Turpin, "whether that old dried up otomy, who ought to grin in a glass case for folks to stare at, be kith and kin of such a bang-up cove as your fancy man, Luke. But in faith it is."

"Though he be thy grandsire, Luke," said Sybil, "I like him not. His glance resembles that of the Evil Eye."

And, in fact, the look which Peter fixed upon her was such as the rattlesnake casts upon its victim, and Sybil felt as the poor fluttering bird may feel. She could not remove her eyes from his, though she trembled as she gazed. This species of fascination was one that Peter loved to practise. We have said his eyes were like those of the toad. Age had not dimmed their brilliancy. In his harsh features you could only read bitter scorn, or withering hate; but in his eyes resided a magnetic influence of attraction or repulsion. Sybil underwent the former feeling in a disagreeable degree. She was drawn to him by the motion of a whirlpool, and involuntarily clung to Luke.

"It is—it is the Evil Eye, dear Luke."

"Tut, tut, dear Sybil; I tell thee it is my grandsire."

"The girl says rightly, however," rejoined Turpin, "Peter has a damned ugly look about the ogles, and stares enough to put a modest wench out of countenance. Come, come, my old earth-worm, crawl along, we have waited for thee long enough. Is this the first time thou hast seen a pretty lass, eh?"

"It is the first time I have seen one so beautiful," said Peter; "and I crave her pardon, if my freedom hath offended her. I wonder not at thy enchantment, grandson Luke, now I behold the object of it. But there is one piece of counsel I would give to this fair maid. The next time she trusts thee from her sight, I would advise her to await thee at the hill top, otherwise the chances are shrewdly against thy reaching the ground with neck unbroken."

There was something, notwithstanding the satirical manner in which Peter delivered this speech, calculated to make a more favourable impression upon Sybil than his previous conduct had inspired her with; and, having ascertained from Luke to what his speech referred, she extended her hand to him, yet not without a shudder, as his skinny fingers clasped her own. It was like the hand of Venus in the grasp of a skeleton.

"It is a little hand," said Peter, "and I have some skill myself in palmistry. Shall I peruse its lines?"

"Not now, in the devil's name," said Turpin, stamping impatiently. "We shall have old Ruffin* himself amongst us presently, if Peter Bradley grows gallant."

Leading their horses, the party took their way through the trees. A few minutes' walking brought them in sight of the encampment, the spot selected for which might be termed the Eden of the valley. A paradise it seemed. Art and nature had conspired to render it charming. Nature had encircled a

* Devil.

small green plain, smooth as well shorn lawn, kept ever verdant (excepting in such places as the frequent fires of the gipsies had scorched its surface), by the flowing stream that rushed past it, with an amphitheatre of wooded hills, and so disposed the timber that flourished thereupon, that, in the language of the painter, each tree protruding from the crag might be said to "*tell*;" while Art had strewn the velvet carpet with the canvass tent and its patches of varied colouring, the rude fashioned hut, of primitive construction, such as might be erected by a wandering Tartar horde—the kettle slung

." Between two poles, upon a stick transverse."

with the tethered beasts of burthen, and the mouldering ruins of the priory of St. Francis, which latter finished the picture with a noble background.

Glimmering through the trees, at the extremity of the plain, might be seen the ivy-mantled walls of the once celebrated pile. Though much had gone to decay, enough remained to show what had been the pristine state of this once majestic edifice; and the long, though broken line of the Saxon arches that still marked the cloister wall—the piers that yet supported the dormitory—the enormous horse-shoe arch which still spanned the court—and, above all, the great, glorious, marigold or circular window, which had terminated the chapel, and which, though now despoiled of its painted honours, retained, like the skeleton leaf, its fibrous intricacies entire, all eloquently spake of the glories of the past, while they awakened reverence and admiration for the still enduring beauty of the present.

Towards these ruins Sybil conducted the party.

"Do you dwell therein?" asked Peter, pointing towards the Priory.

"That is my dwelling," said Sybil.

"It is one I should covet," returned the Sexton, "more than a modern mansion."

"I love those old walls better than any house that was ever fashioned," said Sybil.

As they entered upon the Prior's Close, as it was called, several swarthy figures made their appearance from the tents. Many a greeting was bestowed upon Luke, in the wild jargon of the tribe. At length, an uncouth dwarfish figure, with a shock head of black hair, hopped towards them: he seemed to acknowledge Luke as his master.

"What ho, Grasshopper," said Luke; "here, take the horses, and hark ye, see that they lack neither dressing, nor provender, or I may make you skip higher than you have ever yet done."

"And hark ye, Grasshopper," said Turpin; "I give you a special charge about this mare. Neither dress her nor feed her till I see both done myself. Just walk her about for ten

minutes, and if you have a glass of ale in the place, let her sip it."

"Your bidding shall be done," chirped the human insect; and he fluttered away with his charges.

A motley assemblage of tawny-skinned varlets, dark-eyed women and children, whose dusky limbs betrayed their lineage, in strange costume, and of wild deportment, checked the path, pronouncing welcome upon welcome into the ear of Luke as he passed. As it was evident he was not in the mood for converse, Sybil, who appeared to be one who had authority amongst them, with a word dispersed them, and the troop herded back to their respective habitations.

A low door admitted them into what had once been the garden, in which some old moss-encrusted trees were still standing, bearing a look of antiquity almost as venerable as that of the adjoining fabric. Another open door gave them entrance to a spacious chamber, which was formerly the eating room, or refectory of the Holy Brotherhood; and a goodly but gloomy room it had been, though now its slender lanceolated windows were stuffed with hay, to keep out the piercing air. Large holes told where oaken rafters had once crossed the roof; and a yawning aperture pointed out the place where a cheering fire had formerly blazed. As regarded this latter spot, the good old custom was not even now totally abrogated. An iron plate, covered with crackling wood, sustained a pondrous black cauldron, the rich steam from which gratefully affected the olfactory organs of the Highwayman.

"That augurs well," said he, rubbing his hands.

"Still hungering after the flesh pots of Egypt," said the Sexton, with a ghastly smile.

"We will see what that kettle contains," said Luke.

"Handassah, Grace," exclaimed Sybil, calling.

Her summons was answered by two maidens, habited, not unbecomingly, in gipsy gear.

"Bring the best our larder can furnish," said Sybil, "and use despatch; you have appetites to provide for, sharpened by a long ride in the open air."

"And by a night's fasting," added Luke; "and solitary confinement to boot."

"And a night of business," rejoined Turpin, "and plaguing, perplexing business into the bargain."

"And the night of a funeral too," doled Peter, "and that the funeral of a father. Let us have breakfast speedily, by all means. We have rare appetites."

An old oaken table, it might have been the self-same upon which the holy friars had broken their morning fast, stood in the middle of the room. The ample board soon groaned beneath the weight of the savoury cauldron; the unctuous contents of which proved to be a couple of dismembered pheasants, an equal proportion of poultry, great gouts of ham, mushrooms,

meats, and other jocular condiments, so satisfactory to Dick Turpin, that, upon tasting a morsel, he absolutely shed tears of delight. The dish was indeed the triumph of gipsy cookery, and its execution worthy of the genius of the immortal Udd, to whom we recommend especially the study of a *Fatage à la Bohémienne*, assuring him, that if, like Richard Turpin, he should ever meet with such fare after a night of severely fatiguing business, in his attendance upon his club, he will find no more salutary breakfast than that of which the Highwayman partook. So sedulously did Dick apply himself to his merriment, and so complete was his abstraction, that he perceived not that he was left alone; it was only when about to wash down the last drumstick of the last fowl with a can of excellent ale, that he made this discovery.

"What, all gone—and Peter Bradley, too—what the devil does this mean?" said he. "I must not muddle my brain with with any more Pharaoh,* though I have feasted like a king of Egypt. That will never do. Caution—Dick—caution. Suppose I shift you brick out of the wall, and place this precious document beneath it. Pshaw, Luke would never play me false. And now for Bess—bless her black skin—she'll wonder where I've been so long. It's not my way to leave her to shift for herself, though she can do that on a pinch."

Soliloquizing thus, he arose, and walked towards the door.

CHAPTER III.

The wiving vine, that round the friendly elm
Twines her soft limbs, and weaves a leafy mantle
For her supporting lover, dares not venture
To mix her humble boughs with the embraces
Of the more lofty cedar.

GLAPTHORNE, ALBERTUS WALLENSTEIN.

BENEATH a mouldering wall, whither they had strayed, to be free from interruption, sat Sybil and her lover, upon a carpet of moss.

With eager curiosity she listened to his tale. He recounted all that had befallen him since his departure. He told her of the awful revelations of the tomb—of the ring that, like a talisman, had conjured up a thousand brilliant prospects in the gloom—of his subsequent perils—of his escapes—of his rencontre with Lady Rookwood—of his visit to his father's body—and of his meeting with his brother. All this she heard with a cheek now flushed with expectation, now grown pale with apprehension—with palpitating bosom, and with suppressed

* Strong drink.

breath. But, when taking a softer tone, love, affection, happiness, inspired the theme, and he sought to paint the bliss that should be theirs in his new estate—when he would throw his fortune into her lap—his titles at her feet, and bid her wear them with him—when, with ennobled hand and unchanged heart, he would fulfil the troth plighted by him, the sunset, she despised—in lieu of tender, grateful acquiescence, the features of Sybil became overcast—the soft smile faded away, and even as spring sunshine is succeeded by the sudden shower, the light that dwelt in her sunny orbs grew dim with tears.

Luke gazed at her in amazement, and with displeasure. He had not expected this reception of his suit; on the contrary, he deemed that the anticipation of aggrandizement, which he held out, would have been rapturously welcomed. That it was not so, was clear. A painful struggle was evidently taking place in Sybil's bosom. Perplexed and mortified, Luke neither spoke nor stirred. We have said that a new train of feeling was awakened within him—that pride was usurping the sacred seat of love—and that his affection for Sybil had received a severe shock. In all probability, had his proposition been met in the manner he expected by Sybil—had she eagerly acquiesced with his expressed wishes, and unhesitatingly and gratefully complied with his offers, he might then have felt that he had rashly committed himself (for Peter Bradley's stinging words still rankled in his recollection like barbed shafts)—and crippled his free purposes on the very threshold of his career. But he had found it otherwise; and when, with hesitation in his heart, though passion upon his lips, he had offered all to her—her hand was withdrawn—her face averted—her eyes filled with tears. "Capricious, inconsistent, heartless, insensible! Shall I yield to her humours? Shall I stoop to her?" were his thoughts, "Stoop to Sybil!" echoed his conscience; and as he looked at her, he felt that his thoughts had belied his heart.

And what were Sybil's emotions? Was she, in reality, the capricious, inconsistent being, Luke had suddenly imagined her to be? Could she not sympathize with his success? She could—she could. There was no thought of her lover's which she could not divine, with which her own wishes were not identified. Hers was a devotion passing the love of woman; in that it was absolute devotion. Nought was suffered to stand between her and her lover. No other sentiment possessed her. She had no kindred, save Barbara, to claim her duty, her affections. She was not distracted with worldly dreams—with thoughts of pleasures or of vanities. She lived for her lover, and for him alone. Beneath her gentle exterior burnt a flame that was to all others a scorching fire: to her lover, innocent as the tongue of flame that licked the prophet's feet. Adoring him thus, can it for an instant be supposed that she was indif-

ferent to her lover's advancement—that she gloried not in his rise—or that she was meanly jealous of his success? No one could suspect it; and Luke, although he might give vent to impatience, did not, for more than an instant, indulge the thought. At length she raised her eyes, and in them beamed such mournful tenderness, that whatever stern resolves Luke had formed, they disappeared at once before it.

“Why—why is this, dear Sybil?” cried he. “To what am I to attribute these tears? You do not, sure, regret my good fortune?”

“Not on your own account, dear Luke,” returned she, sadly; “the tears I shed were for myself.—The first, the only tears that I have ever shed for such cause, and,” added she, raising her head like a flower surcharged with moisture, “they shall be the last.”

“This is inexplicable, dear Sybil. Why should you lament for yourself—if not for me! Doth not the sunshine of prosperity, that now shines upon me, gild you with the same beam? Did I not, even now, affirm, that the day that saw me enter my father's halls, should dawn upon our espousals?”

“True, but the sun that shines upon you, to me wears a threatening aspect—the day of those espousals will never dawn.”

“What do I hear?” exclaimed Luke, astonished at the avowal of his mistress, sadly and deliberately delivered, which smote upon his ears like a knell. “You cannot mean what you aver; some witchcraft hath been practised—I am possessed by it myself. Hath Peter Bradley—hath that fiend poisoned thy ears likewise? Hath he wrought upon thee, as he fain would have wrought upon me? But I resisted the tempter—I trampled him beneath me; I shook him off, as thou must cast him from thee. Not wed me!—And wherefore not? Is it the rank that I have acquired, or hope to acquire, that displeaseth thee? Declare it, if it be so, that I may at once abandon all further quest of fortune's favours, which would be dearly paid for, if purchased with loss of thee. Speak, that I may waste no further time in thus pursuing the shadows of happiness, while the reality fleets from me.”

“And *are* they shadows—and *is* this the reality, dear Luke! It may be that thou sayest truly; but wilt thou continue to think so? Nay, dost thou think so now? Question thy secret soul, and thou wilt find it otherwise. Thou couldst not forego thy triumph; it is not likely; thou hast dwelt too much upon the proud title which will be thine, to yield it to another, when it may be won so easily. And above all, when thy mother's reputation, and thy own stained name, may be cleared by one word, breathed aloud, wouldst thou fail to utter it? No, dear Luke, I read thy heart, thou wouldst not.”

“And if I could *not* forego this, wherefore is it that thou re-

fusest to be a sharer in my triumph? Why wilt thou render my honours valueless, when I have acquired them? Thou lovest me not."

"Not love thee, Luke?"

"Approve it, then."

"I do approve it. Bear witness the sacrifice I am about to make of all my hopes, at the shrine of my idolatry to thee. Bear witness, the agony of this hour. Bear witness, the horror of the avowal, that I never can be yours. As Luke Bradley I would, joyfully—oh, how joyfully, have been your bride. As Sir Luke Rookwood"—and she shuddered, as she pronounced the name, "I never can be so."

"Then, by heaven! Luke Bradley will I remain. But wherefore—wherefore not as Sir Luke Rookwood?"

"Because," replied Sybil, with reluctance, "because I am no longer thy equal. The gipsy's low-born daughter is no mate for Sir Luke Rookwood. Love cannot blind me, dear Luke. It cannot make me other than I am—it cannot exalt me in mine own esteem, nor in that of the world, with which, thou, alas! too soon wilt mingle, and which will regard even me as—no matter what—it shall not scorn me as thy bride. I will not bring shame and reproach on thee. Oh if, for me, dear Luke, the proud ones of the earth were to treat thee with contumely, this heart would break with agony. For myself, I have pride sufficient—perchance too much; perchance 'tis pride that actuates me now. I know not. But for thee, I am all weakness. As thou wert heretofore, I would have been to thee the tenderest and truest wife that ever breathed; as thou art now——"

"Hear me, Sybil."

"Hear me out, dear Luke. One other motive there is, that determines my present conduct, which, were all else surmounted, would in itself suffice. Ask me not what that is: I cannot explain it. For your own sake, I implore you, be satisfied with my refusal."

"What a destiny is mine!" exclaimed Luke, striking his forehead with his clenched hand. "No choice is left me. Either way I destroy mine own happiness. On the one hand standeth Love—on the other, Fame; yet neither will conjoin."

"Pursue then fame," said Sybil, energetically, "if thou *canst* hesitate. Forget that I have ever existed—forget that thou hast ever loved—forget that such a passion dwells within the human heart, and thou mayst still be happy, though thou art great."

"And do you deem," replied Luke, with frantic impatience, "that I *can* accomplish this—that I *can* forget that I have loved? you—that I *can* forget you? Cost what it will, the effort shall be made. Yet by our former love, I charge thee tell me what

hath wrought this change in thee? Why dost thou *now* refuse me?"

"I have said you are Sir Luke Rookwood," returned Sybil, with painful emotion. "Doth that name import nothing?"

"Imports it aught of ill?"

"To me, everything of ill. It is a fated house. Its line are all predestined."

"To what?" demanded Luke.

"To *murder*!" replied Sybil, with solemn emphasis. "To the murder of their wives. Forgive me, Luke, if I have dared to utter this. Yourself compelled me to it."

Amazement, horror, wrath, kept Luke silent for a few moments. Starting to his feet, he cried—

"And can you suspect me of a crime so foul? Think you, because I shall assume the name, that I shall put on the nature likewise of the race? Do you believe that I am capable of aught so horrible?"

"Oh no—no, I believe it not. I am sure you would not do it. Your soul would reject with horror, such a deed; but if fate should guide your hand—if the avenging spirit of your murdered ancestress should point the steel, you could not shun it then."

"My murdered ancestress! to what do you allude?"

"To a tradition of your house. 'Tis said, that the first of the race from which you now claim descent, Sir Ranulph Rookwood, slew his dame, in jealous indignation for imaginary wrong. Her prayers, her tears, her adjurations of innocence—and she *was* innocent—all her agony, could not move him. He stabbed her thrice. He smote the bleeding corse, and as life was ebbing fast away, with her fleeting breath she pronounced a curse upon her murderer, and upon his race. She had invoked all the powers of mercy, and of goodness, to aid her. A deaf ear had been turned unto her agonized entreaties. With her dying lips she summoned those of hell. She surrendered her soul to the dark Spirit of Evil, for revenge; and the revenge was accorded her. She died—but her curse survived. That fatal malediction attached to her Lord, and to all his line. No penance could expiate the offence—no tears wash out the bloody stain—all have been hurried into the commission of the same crime. Yet as it hath been a fate, a ministration of the Spirit of Evil, none have suffered the punishment of their guilt. Where their affection hath been fixed, hath their dagger struck. Was it not so with thy father—with Sir Reginald—Sir Ralph—Sir Ranulph? And when I tell thee this, dear Luke—when I find thee bear the name of this accursed race, canst thou wonder, if I shudder at adding to the dismal list of the victims of that ruthless spirit: and that I tremble for thee? I would die for thee, willingly—but not by thy hand. I would not that my blood, which I would now pour out for thee as freely as water, should rise up

in judgment against thee. For myself I have no fears—for thee, a thousand. My mother, upon her death-bed, told me I should never be thine. I believed her not, for I was happy then. She said that we never should be united; or, if united——”

“What, in heaven’s name?”

“That thou wouldst be my destroyer; that thy love should turn to hatred—and thou wouldst slay me. How could I credit her words then? How can I doubt them now, when I find thou art a Rookwood? And think not, dear Luke, that I am ruled by selfish fears in this resolve. To renounce thee may cost me my life; but the deed will be my own. Thou mayst call me superstitious, credulous: I have been nurtured in credulity. It is the faith of my fathers. There are those, methinks, who have an insight into futurity; and such boding words have been spoken, that, be they true or false, I will not risk their fulfilment in my person. I may be credulous—I may be weak—I may be erring—but I am steadfast in this. Bid me perish at your feet, and I will do it. But I will not be your Fate. I will not be the wretched instrument of your perdition. I will love, I will worship—I will watch, serve—perish for you—but I will not wed you.”

Exhausted with the vehemence of her emotion, she would have sunk upon the ground, had not Luke caught her in his arms. Pressing her to his bosom, he renewed his passionate protestations. Every argument was unavailing—Sybil appeared inflexible.

“You love me as you have ever loved me?” said she, at length.

“A thousand fold more fervently,” replied Luke. “Put it to the test.”

“How? If I dared do so. Consider well—I may ask too much.”

“Name it. If it be not to surrender thee, by my mother’s body I will obey thee.”

“I would propose an oath.”

“An oath?”

“A solemn binding oath, that, if thou weddest me not, thou wilt not wed another. Ha! dost thou start? Have I appalled thee?”

“I start? I will take it—Hear me—by—”

“Hold!” exclaimed a voice behind them—“do not forswear thyself;” and immediately afterwards the sexton made his appearance. There was a malignant scowl upon his countenance. The lovers started at the ominous interruption.

“Begone,” cried Luke.

“Take not that oath,” said Peter, “and I leave you. Remember the counsel which I gave you on our way hither.”

“What counsel did he give thee, Luke?” inquired Sybil, eagerly of her lover.

"We spoka of thee, fond girl," replied Peter. "I cautioned him against the match. I knew not thy sentiments, or I had spared myself the trouble. Thou hast judged wisely. Were he to wed thee, ill must come of it: but he *must* wed another."

"*MUST!*" cried Sybil, her eyes absolutely emitting sparkles of indignation from their night-like depths; and, unsheathing, as she spoke, the short poignard which she wore at her girdle, she rushed towards Peter, raising her hand to strike. "*Must* wed another! and darest thou counsel this?"

"Put up thy dagger, fair maiden," said Peter, calmly. "Had I been younger, thine eyes might have had more terror for me than thy weapon; as it is, I am proof against both. Thou wouldst not strike an old man like myself, and of thy lover's kin?"

Sybil's uplifted hand fell to her side.

"'Tis true," continued the sexton, "I dared to give him this advice; and when thou hast heard me out, thou wilt not, I am persuaded, think me so unreasonable as, at first, I may appear to be. I have been an unseen listener to your converse—not that I desire to pry into your secrets—far from it; but I overheard you by accident. I applaud your resolution: but if you are inclined to sacrifice all for your lover's weal, do not let the work be incomplete. Bind him not by oaths, which he will regard as spider's webs, to be burst through at pleasure. Thou seest, as well as I, that he is bent on being Lord of Rookwood; and in truth, to an aspiring youth, such a desire is natural—is praiseworthy. It will be pleasant, as well as honourable, to efface the stain that has been cast upon his birth. It will be an act of filial duty in him, to restore his mother's good name; and I, her father, laud his anxiety on that score; though, to speak truth, fair maid, I am not rigid as your nice moralists in my view of human nature, and can allow a latitude to love, which their nicer scruples will not admit. It will be a proud thing to triumph over his implacable foe; and this he may accomplish——"

"Without marriage," interrupted Sybil, angrily.

"True," returned Peter—"yet not maintain it. May win it, but not wear it. Thou hast said truly, the house of Rookwood is a fated house; and it hath been said, likewise, that if he wed not one of his own kindred—that if Rook mate not with Rook, his possessions shall pass away from his hands, as thou shalt hear." And Peter repeated the prophetic quatrain, with which the reader is already acquainted. "Thou hearest what this quaint rhyme saith. Luke is, doubtless, the stray Rook, and there is a fledgling, that I wot not of, flown hither from a distant country. He must take her to his mate, or relinquish her and the 'ancient nest' to his brother. For my own part, I disregard such sayings. I have little faith in prophecy and divination. I see not why it should be so. I know not

what Eleanor Mowbray, for so she is called, can have to do with the tenure of the estates of Rookwood. It may be so, or it may not be so. But if Luke Rookwood, after he hath lorded it for awhile in splendour, be cast forth again in his rage and wretchedness, let him not blame his grandsire for his own want of caution."

"Luke, I implore thee, tell me," said Sybil, who had listened, horror-stricken, to the sexton, shuddering, as it were, beneath the chilly influence of his malevolent look—"is this true? Doth thy fate depend upon Eleanor Mowbray? Who is she? What hath she to do with Rookwood? Hast thou seen her? Dost thou love her?"

"I have never seen her," replied Luke.

"Thank God for that," cried Sybil. "Then thou lovest her not."

"How were that possible?" returned Luke. "Do I not say I have not seen her?"

"Who is she, then?"

"This old man tells me she is my cousin. She is betrothed to my brother, Ranulph."

"How?" ejaculated Sybil. To thy brother, Ranulph! And wouldst thou snatch his betrothed from his arms? Wouldst thou break her heart, as, if she love him, thou must do? Wouldst thou do him this grievous wrong? Bethink thee, dear Luke. Is it not enough that thou must wrest from him that which he hath long deemed his own? And if he hath falsely deemed it so, it will not make his loss the less bitter. In what thou doest now thou art justified. Thou hast a right to what is thine own—the estates of Rookwood are thine own—but she is *not* thine own. But why do I thus affright myself? If she love thy brother, Eleanor Mowbray will die, sooner than give to thee the hand which she pledged to him. I know not how those who have been more gently nurtured than myself feel, but I had rather been torn piece-meal by wild horses—had rather fling myself into the roaring torrent, that dashes from yon rock, than forfeit so my fealty. If thou thus wrong'st thy brother, do not look for happiness—do not look for respect, for neither will be thy portion. Even this stony-hearted old man shrinks aghast from such a deed—his snake-like eyes are buried on the ground. See, I have moved even him."

And in truth Peter did appear, for an instant, strangely moved.

"'Tis nothing," returned he, mastering his emotion by strong effort. "What is all this to me? I never had a brother—I never had aught—wife, child, or relative, that loved me. And I love not the world, nor the things of the world, nor those that inhabit the world—but I know what sways the world, and its inhabitants, and that is—*SELF—AND SELF INTEREST!* Let Luke reflect on this. The key to Rookwood is Eleanor Mowbray."

The hand that grasps hers, grasps those lands—thus saith the prophecy.”

“It is a lying prophecy.”

“It was uttered by one of thy race.”

“By whom?”

“By Barbary Lovel,” said Peter with a sneer of triumph.

“Ha!”

“Heed him not,” exclaimed Luke, as Sybil recoiled at this intelligence. “I am thine.”

“Not mine—not mine,” shrieked she; “but oh, not *hers*.”

“Whither goest thou?” cried Luke, as Sybil, half bewildered, tore herself from him.

“To Barbara Lovel.”

“I will go with thee.”

“No; let me go alone—I have much to ask her; yet tarry not with this old man, dear Luke—or close thine ears, like the deaf adder, to his crafty talk. Avoid him. Oh, I am sick at heart. Follow me not—I implore thee, follow me not.”

And with distracted air she darted amongst the mouldering cloister, leaving Luke stupefied with anguish and surprise. The Sexton maintained a stern and stoical composure.

“She is but woman, after all,” muttered he; “all her high-flown resolves melt like snow in the sunshine, at the thought of a rival. I congratulate thee, grandson Luke—thou art free from thy fetters.”

“Free!” echoed Luke. “Quit my sight—I loathe to look upon thee. Thou hast broken the truest heart that ever beat in woman’s bosom.”

“Tut, tut,” returned Peter; “it is not broken yet. Wait till we hear what old Barbara has got to say; and, meanwhile, we must arrange with Dick Turpin the price of that certificate. The knave knows its value well. Come, be a man. This is worse than womanish.”

And, at length, he succeeded, half by force and half by persuasion, in dragging Luke away with him.

CHAPTER IV.

Los Gitanos son encantadores, adivinos, magos, chyromanticos, que dicen por las rayas de las manos lo Futuro, que ellos ilaman Buenaventura, y generalmente son dados a toda supersticion.

DOCTOR SANCHO DE MONCADA.

Discurso sobre la Espulsion de los Gitanos.

Like a dove, escaped from the talons of the falcon, Sybil fled from the clutches of the Sexton. Her brain was in a whirl, her bosom in fire; she had no distinct perception of ex-

ternal objects—no definite notion of what she, herself, was about to do, and glided more like a fitting spirit than a living woman, along the ruined ambulatory. Her hair had fallen in disorder over her face—she stayed not to adjust it, but tossed aside the blinding locks with frantic impatience. She felt as one may feel who tries to strain his nerves, shattered by illness, to the endurance of some dreadful, yet necessary pain.

Racked by a thousand fears, lest she should accelerate her fate, and involve her lover in more peril, Sybil wished to make one feeble effort to re-establish or utterly overthrow her own peace of mind. What she hoped to gain by the interview with her aged relative, she scarce knew. Her main object was to confirm to herself (for drowning love will cling to straws) the truth of Luke's assertions; not that she doubted his veracity, but she still trusted that he might be in error, even as to the extent of his claims to the title and to the estates of Rookwood. This, at once she could ascertain, by appealing to Barbara, who had seen the body of his mother—who had embalmed it—who must have perceived the ring (that startling evidence of the marriage of the departed), had there been ring upon the finger—whose skill in simples, in medical craft, and knowledge of the human frame, would at once have told her if the dead had come to her end fairly; and who could at once verify the Sexton's statement respecting the prophecy. This she could learn at once. Were there a doubt, or a shadow of a doubt, she might yet be happy. But what if Barbary confirmed it all? If she *had* seen the ring? She dared not think on that.

Sybil loved her relative, old Barbary; but it was with a love tempered by fear. Barbara was not a person to inspire esteem, or to claim affection. She was regarded, by the wild tribe, which she ruled, as their Queen elect, with some such feeling of inexplicable awe as is entertained by the African slave for the Obeah Woman. They acknowledged her power, unhesitatingly obeyed her commands, and shrank with terror from her anathema, which was indeed seldom pronounced; but when uttered, was considered as doom. Her tribe she looked upon as her flock, and stretched her maternal hand over all, ready alike to cherish or chastise; and having already survived a generation, that which succeeded,—having from infancy imbibed a superstitious veneration for the "cunning woman," as she was called, the sentiment could never be wholly eradicated; but continued in such force in after-life, as to make the fiercest of that fierce race implicitly to comply with her mandates, and bow in submission to her edicts.

One circumstance, indeed, might have some control over the band. From whatever source derived, she had obtained a hoard of gold, and this she distributed freely. She could reward as well as punish, and was withal, wise enough to main-

tain good order, and promote concord. By means of her strangely acquired wealth, she had, it was said, frequently diverted the course of justice, and effected the liberation of several of the wildest of her gang from jail, or, at least, had afforded them comforts during their confinement. These favours were never forgotten, and Barbary had acquired an absolute ascendancy over every individual composing her formidable tribe—an ascendancy which increased as she advanced in years (for store of years is supposed, by this savage people, to bring with it store of wisdom), so that at the period of our tale, when she had already numbered more than eighty winters, the will of Barbara, once expressed, was law. Add to all this, the knowledge which she possessed of the power and virtue of all healing plants and roots; the skill which she displayed in their application; the frequent cures she had performed; the strange instruments, the drugs, the oils, the distillments, the spicy woods, which she possessed, and the mystery she observed in the art she practised (for Barbara knew full well the advantage of concealment); these, and a hundred other reasons, made her appear to her people as the High Priestess of their mystic rites, endowed, from some dark sources, with magic power. Some, indeed, entertained the belief, that she had obtained her power, her gold, and her length of life, by the barter of her soul to the evil one; but, as the prevailing opinion amongst the gipsy people happened to be, that man has no soul to dispose of, this hypothesis was treated with the contempt it deserved, by the majority. All, however, concurred in thinking her a remarkable woman; and in whatever speculation they might privately indulge, none dared openly to disobey her.

Sybil partook, in a measure, of these sentiments. How could it be otherwise? She was born in another land—under a warmer sun—amongst a more fiery, yet amongst a people who followed the same pursuits, modified by the customs of the land in which they dwelt, and directed towards the same end. Her youth, her maturer years, if her years could even as yet be called mature, had been spent under the surveillance of Barbara. Her father—a contrabandist—a mountain smuggler—had perished by the carbines of the soldiery. His widow was taken—imprisoned—tortured—condemned as an heretic, to perish at the Auto-da-Fé.

Here it was that Barbara's power was shown to its utmost extent. By that wonderful freemasonry which exists amongst this singular race, and enables them to communicate with each other in different places, and in different countries, Barbara, with a celerity almost inconceivable, had received intelligence of her daughter's imprisonment. She set out. Crossing France—she scaled the Pyrennees—she traversed Spain—she passed through Madrid—she arrived at Toledo, in which town her unfortunate child was confined. There she lost all trace of her: her agents could supply her with no further information. She

was not in the public prison; and, trembling with horror, anxiety, and apprehension, the mother was obliged to await the day of execution for a glimpse of her child, and to postpone the execution of her plans until that period, and so double the danger and hazard of a rescue, if she dared to attempt a rescue at all. But what will not a mother attempt, and a mother to whom fear is unknown?

Meantime, the wretched prisoner knew not of all this. She had experienced all the tortures of the Question. The rack could extort nothing from her. There was nothing to be extorted. She was no magician;—she was no idolatress;—but she was a Gitana—and this was sufficient, without proof of sorcery—and, to her misfortune, she was a mother. Sybil, her child, an infant then, was the companion of her prison. Amidst all this horror, the child was unaffrighted, till she saw her mother, pale, lacerated, bleeding, fresh from the teeth of the rack, brought back to the dungeon. The mother murmured not; she tried to smile; but the child recoiled from her bleeding touch. A refinement of cruelty suggested itself to the minds of these human leeches—*the child should witness her mother's torture*: it should stand beside her. Reversing the Levitical Law, they purposed to “seethe the kid in the milk of its mother.” The idea was too horrible. So soon as she understood their meaning, she confessed a falsehood—she proclaimed her heresies—she condemned herself to the stake.

Attired in all the tragical masquerade of that impious festival, bare-footed, with the candle in her hand, clad in the garments of the Holy Office, crowned with the flame-coloured cap, leading her child by the hand, walked the wretched woman, in expectation of her fate; the bells rang, the people shouted, the light-hearted laughed, the bigots exulted. Some admired her dark eyes and her small feet, for she was a beautiful woman; some pitied the forlorn little child, whose bewildered gaze was turned half in fear, half in admiration, upon the assembled multitude; some few wept at the mother's anguish; but more rejoiced at the death of the heretic and the heathen. All at once, there was a rush made amongst the crowd. A number of masked inquisitors, for such they seemed, enveloped in long sable cloaks, accompanied by their familiars, by the Alguacils, the Corregidor masked likewise, and by several cowed priests, started forward. Without a word, without a blow, they seized upon the victim, and upon her child—they bore them off; and, before an attempt could be made at rescue, had disappeared. This bold deed had been so suddenly executed, and by such a formidable cavalcade, that no one had dared to interfere; and though all the city was searched, every house ransacked, every gate closed, every suspicious person examined, every pass scrupulously noted, no trace of the lost victim, of her child, or of the perpetrators, was discovered. The Holy Brotherhood was panic-stricken. The Ladrones, Rufianes, the Cingárcos, and the

whole horde of vagabonds who infested a certain portion of the city*, were suspected, but it could never be brought home to them; and in due season the affair was hushed up, or forgotten.

Barbara escaped, and furthermore succeeded in bringing her daughter and her grandchild to England. Sybil's mother did not long survive. She had suffered too much by the rack, the thumbscrew, and other horrible treatment in the abominable dungeon in which she had been thrust; but she died not at the stake, and there was enough. She had been her mother's youngest child—the child of her old age—the only daughter—and as such, the beloved—the favourite. Barbara nursed her—tended her; but she could not restore the suppleness of the broken joints—she could not heal those gasping lungs, burst by the weight imposed upon her breast. She died, and bequeathed her daughter to her mother's care, and Sybil had been to her as a child, yet not as her own child.

This achievement was a subject of unmingled triumph to Barbara. She often boasted of it, and with reason. To have torn his prey from the jaws of the tiger in his own lair, were an easy task, compared with the wresting of a victim from the fangs of the Inquisition; yet she had accomplished it, with the assistance of the Gitanos, who were disguised in the manner described; but not, as she shrewdly remarked in describing the event, without an awful waste of gold, which she poured out like water. "But," added Barbara, "you all know that when I want gold I need only to dig for it. This staff," showing her bifurcate hazel rod, without which she never stirred, "will always show me where it lies."

While on the subject of the Divining Rod, we may mention that, addicted to the practice of divination, Barbara did not, as is the case with most of her tribe, confine herself to the pursuit of a single branch of that abstruse science, as chiromancy, but followed it through its remotest branches, seeking to obtain knowledge of good and ill, and to foresee the future fate and fortune of those who consulted her, like the augurs of old, by what Gaule, in his *Mag-astro-mancer*, describes as "Antinopomancy, by the entrails of men, women, and children; Theriomancy, by beasts; Ornithomancy, by birds; Ickthyomancy, by fishes; Hydromancy, by water; Botanomancy, by herbs; Cleromancy, by lots; Catoptromancy, by looking-glasses." Though we cannot avouch that she extended her inspections so far in her Typomancy, or the coagulation of cheese, or to that farthest flight of art, "Cephaleonomancy, or consultation by the braying of an ass's head." There were few things, however,

* En la Ciudad de Toledo
Donde flor de Bayles son.

Romance de Germania.

for which she did not draw conclusions, and her whole soul seemed absorbed in pondering upon past events, and muttering prophetic speculations for the future.

To return. Winding her way, she knew not how, through roofless halls, over disjointed fragments of fallen pillars, Sybil reached a flight of steps. A door, studded with iron nails, stayed her progress; it was an old strong oaken door, surmounted by a gothic arch, in the key-stone of which was one of those grotesque demoniacal faces with which the Fathers of the Church delighted to adorn their shrines. Sybil looked up—her glance encountered the leering gaze of the fantastic visage. It recalled the features of the Sexton, and seemed to mock her—to revile her. Her fortitude at once deserted her—her fingers were upon the handle of the door. She hesitated: she even drew back, with the intention of departing, for she felt then that she dared not face Barbara. It was too late—she had moved the handle. A deep voice from within, called to her by her name. She dared not disobey that call: she entered.

The room in which Sybil found herself was the only entire apartment now existing in the Priory. It had survived the ravages of time, it had escaped the devastation of man, whose ravages outstrip those of time. Octagonal, lofty, yet narrow, you saw at once that it formed the interior of a turret. It was lighted by a small oriel window, commanding a lovely view of the scenery around, and panelled with oak, richly wrought in ribs and groins; and from overhead depended a moulded ceiling of honey-comb plaster-work. This room had something, even now, in the days of its desecration, of monastic beauty about it. Where the odour of sanctity had breathed forth, the fumes of idolatry prevailed; but imagination, ever on the wing, flew back to that period (and a tradition to that effect warranted the supposition), when, perchance, it had been the sanctuary and the privacy of the Prior's self.

Wrapped in a cloak, composed of the skins of various animals, upon a low pallet, covered with stained scarlet cloth, sat Barbara. Around her head was coiffed, in folds, like those of an Asiatic turban, a rich though faded shawl, and her waist was encircled with the magic Zodiacal Zone—proper to the sorceress—the *Mago Cinea* or the *Cingara* (whence the name, according to Moncada), which Barbara had brought from Spain. From her ears depended long golden drops, of curious antique fashioning; and upon her withered fingers, which were like a coil of lizards, were hooped a multitude of silver rings, of the purest, but simplest, manufacture. They seemed almost of massive unwrought metal. Her skin was as yellow as the body of a toad; corrugated as its back. She might have been steeped in saffron from her finger tips, the nails of which were of the same hue, to such portions of her neck as were visible, and which was puckered up like the throat of a tortoise. To look at her, one might have thought the embalmer had experi-

mented her art upon herself. So dead—so bloodless—so blackened, seemed the flesh, where flesh remained, leather could scarce be tougher than her skin. She seemed like an animated mummy. Such a frame, so prepared, appeared calculated to endure for ages; and, perhaps, might have done so; but, alas! the soul cannot be embalmed; no oil can reilluminate that precious lamp; and that Barbara's vital spark was fast waning, was evident, from her heavy bloodshot eyes, once of a swimming black, and lengthy as a witch's, which were now slaty, and sunken.

The atmosphere of the room was as strongly impregnated as a museum, with volatile odours, emitted from the stores of drugs with which the shelves were loaded, as well as from various stuffed specimens of birds and wild animals. Barbara's only living companion was a monstrous owl, which perched over the old gipsy's head, hissed a token of recognition, as Sybil advanced. From a hook, which had been placed in the plaster roof, was suspended a globe of crystal glass, about the size and shape of a large gourd, filled with a pure pellucid liquid, in which a small snake, the Egyptian aspic, described perpetual gyrations.

Dim were the eyes of Barbara, yet not altogether sightless. The troubled demeanour of her grandchild struck her as she entered. She felt the hot drops upon her hand as Sybil stooped to kiss it: she heard her vainly stifled sobs.

"What ails thee, child?" said Barbara, in a voice that rattled in her throat, and hollow as the articulation of a phantom. "Hast thou heard tidings of Luke Bradley? Hath any ill befallen him? I told thee thou wouldst either hear of him or see him this morning. He is not returned, I see. What hast thou heard?"

"He *is* returned," replied Sybil faintly, "and no ill hath happened to him."

"He *is* returned, and thou here," echoed Barbara. "No ill hath happened to *him*, thou sayest—am I to understand there is ill to *thee*?"

Sybil answered not. She could not answer.

"I see, I see," said Barbara, more gently, her head and hand shaking with paralytic affection—"a quarrel, a lover's quarrel. Old as I am, I have not forgotten my feelings as a girl. What woman ever does, if she be woman? and thou like thy poor mother, art a true hearted wench. She loved her husband, as a husband should be loved, Sybil; and though she loved me well, she loved him better, as was right. Ah! it was a bitter day when she left me and her own land; for though, to one of our wandering race, all countries are alike, yet the soil of our birth is dear to us, and the presence of our kindred dearer. Well, well, I will not think of that. She is gone. Nay, take it not so to heart, wench. Luke hath a hasty temper. 'Tis not the first time I have told thee so. He will not bear rebuke,

and thou hast questioned him too shrewdly, touching his absence. Is it not so? Heed it not. Trust me thou wilt have him seek thy forgiveness ere the shadows shorten 'neath the noontide sun."

"Alas! alas!" said Sybil, sadly, "this is no lover's quarrel, which may, at once, be forgotten and forgiven—would it were so."

"What is it then?" asked Barbara; and without waiting Sybil's answer, she continued, with vehemence—"Hath he wronged thee? Tell me, girl, in what way? Speak, that I may avenge thee, if it be that thy wrong requires revenge. Art thou blood of mine, and thinkest I will not do this for thee, girl! None of the blood of Barbara Lovel was ever unrevenged. I will catch him, though he run—I will trip him, though he leap—I will reach him, though he flee afar—I will drag him hither by the hair of his head," added she, with a livid smile, and clenching her hands, as in the act of dragging some one towards her. "He shall wed thee within the hour, if thou wilt have it; or, if thy honour need that it should be so. My power is not departed from me. My people are yet at my command. I am still their Queen, and wo to him that offendeth me or thee."

"Mother! Mother!" cried Sybil, affrighted at the storm she had unwittingly aroused; "he hath not injured me. 'Tis I alone who am to blame, not Luke; he cannot help it."

"Help what?" asked Barbara; "you speak in mysteries."

"Sir Piers Rookwood is dead."

"Dead!" echoed Barbara, trembling with surprise. "Sir Piers dead—"

"And Luke Bradley—"

"Ha!"

"Is his successor—"

"Who told thee that?" asked Barbara, with increased astonishment.

"Luke himself. I know all—all is disclosed." And Sybil hastily recounted Luke's adventures. "He is now Sir Luke Rookwood."

"This is news, in truth," said Barbara; "yet not news to weep for. Thou shouldst rejoice for, not lament it. Well, well; I saw it—I knew it. I shall live to see all accomplished—to see my Agatha's child ennobled—to see her wedded; ay, to see her well wedded."

"Dearest mother!"

"I can endow thee, and I will do it. Thou shalt bring to thy husband not alone thy beauty—thou shalt bring him wealth."

"But, mother—"

"My Agatha's daughter shall be Lady Rookwood."

"Never! It cannot be."

"What cannot be?"

"The match you now propose."

"Not be. What mean you, silly wench? Not be—it must—it shall—why should it not be? Ha, ha! I perceive the meaning of those tears—the truth flashes upon me—he hath discarded thee."

"No, by the heaven of heavens, he is still the same—unaltered in affection."

"If so, thy tears are out of place—thy sorrow out of season."

"Not so."

"I tell thee yea—ha!—that look—thou wouldst not give me to understand that it is thou who art the jilt?"

"Mother, it is not fitting that I, a gipsy born, should wed with him."

"Not fitting! ha! and thou my child—not fitting! Get up, or I will spurn thee—not fitting! Dry thine eyes, or I will stab thee—not fitting! This from thee to me! I tell thee it is fitting—thou shalt have a dower as ample as that of any lady in the land—not fitting! Is it so thou sayest, because thou thinkest that he derives himself from a proud and ancient line—ancient and proud—ha! ha! I tell thee, girl, that for his one ancestor I can number twenty—for the years in which his lineage hath flourished my race can boast centuries, and was a people—a kingdom, ere the land in which he dwells was known. What! if by the curse of Heaven we were driven forth, the curse of Hell rests upon his house."

"I know it," said Sybil; "a dreadful curse, which, if I wed him, will alight on me."

"No; not on thee—thou shalt avoid that curse!"

"Avoid it!"

"I know a means to satisfy the avenger. Leave that to me."

"I dare not, as it never can be; yet tell me—you saw the body of Luke's ill-fated mother—was she poisoned? Nay, you may speak; Sir Piers's death releases you from your oath. How died she?"

"By strangulation," said the old gipsy, raising her palsied hand to her throat.

"Oh," cried Sybil, gasping with horror. "Was there a ring upon her finger?"

"A ring—a wedding ring. The finger was crookened."

"Then there is no doubt that she was wedded, and that he is Sir Luke Rookwood?"

"Doubt! I would have told Luke all, long, long ago, had not my oath sealed fast my lips. Listen to me, girl. When I was left alone, to do mine office with the corpse of Susan, I saw indubitable proofs upon the body, of her fatal end. She was smothered sleeping, and the ring upon her finger told me, by her husband. I thought that none but those accursed Spanish butchers, who call themselves holy, that maimed my darling, my Agatha, could have hearts savage enough to perpetrate a

dead so horrible; for she looked so beautiful, so innocent, so smiling, even in death, that, little used to weeping, as I was, mine eyes would scarce permit me to complete mine office. She was not unlike thy mother, girl, except that her complexion was more delicate, and lacked thy mother's rich and sunburnt warmth. Well, I came forth—her murderer stood before me—Sir Piers. He trembled in each joint, as I looked at him;—he saw that I knew his guilt—he saw that he was in my power. Peter Bradley was with him likewise. The Sexton watched my looks—he seemed to read the secret in my countenance, and, as he looked from the one to the other, he smiled. I shall never forget that smile—it was a father's smile upon his daughter's murderer, carrying a consciousness of the crime along with it. I asked to be alone with Sir Piers; he feared to comply, yet dared not refuse. We were alone—thou wonderest how I ventured to trust myself with him. I was armed, and then few men could cope with Barbara. I would have stabbed him, if he had stirred—I *could* have stabbed him for a lighter offence. 'You have seen her,' said he. 'I have,' I answered. He dared not continue the conversation. I spoke boldly, for I hated him. 'You were her assassin,' I said. He started. 'Deny it not,' I continued—'your life is forfeit, if I but speak.'—'But you will not speak? If gold will not purchase your silence, fear shall.'—'I deride your threats,' I returned; 'and if you repeat them, I will denounce you. There is a ring upon her finger.' Again he started. 'She was your wife?'—'Alas! replied he, 'she was.'—'What demon prompted you to kill her?' I added. 'Pride, pride,' shrieked he; 'and the curse that is attached to our house, the insatiate spirit which will have its victim. She is gone—she is gone—would I were also dead. Denounce me—give me up to justice—I deserve it all.' His remorseful agony, in a measure, overcame my anger, and, looking steadily upon his face, I saw that he was under the influence of Fate. I even pitied him, such was the extremity of affliction to which he was reduced. After a while, he partially recovered: he brought out gold—'a hoard of gold, it was mine,' he said; 'I should have more, if I would take the oath not to divulge the dreadful secret in his lifetime.' He renewed his entreaties—I took the oath. He then led me into another chamber, where an infant was sleeping—it was a beautiful boy—it was Luke. 'Take this child,' said he; 'the sight of it will only recall her—its presence is dangerous. Take the child, and with it what gold thou wilt. Appoint what place thou thinkest proper, and more shall be sent thee; but hence, away; the sight of that child maddens—it is like an accusing angel.' I took the child—I took his gold—I did not remonstrate with him on the barbarous and unnatural act he was committing. The child I thought would thrive as well with me, and it did thrive, as thou knowest, Sybil, under my care. Amongst the bravest, the boldest, and the handsomest of our tribe, ranked Luke Bradley.

His was the education of a man. Thinkest thou, Sybil, I have forgotten the day when thou returnedst with thy luckless mother! Thou wert an infant then—a very pretty dark-eyed child, and he a boy some years in advance of thee; yet even then, children as ye were, ye seemed to love each other, and then first the thought flashed across me of your union. I have watched you ever since—I have witnessed the growth the progress of your affection—I have affianced you. The period of reward is arrived—he is Sir Luke—he is your husband.”

“Hold, mother, do not deceive yourself,” said Sybil with a fearful earnestness. “He is not yet Sir Luke Rookwood—would he had no claim to be so. The fortune that hath hitherto been so propitious, may yet desert him. Bethink you of a prophecy you uttered.”

“A prophecy? Ha!—”

And with slow enunciation Sybil pronounced the mystic words which she had heard repeated by the Sexton.

As she spake, a gloom, like that of a thunder-cloud, began to gather over the brow of the old gipsy. The orbs of her sunken eyes expanded, and wrath supplied her frame with vigour. She arose.

“Who told thee that?” cried Barbara.

“Peter Bradley.”

“Peter Bradley, the Sexton of Rookwood?” screamed the infuriate woman. “Ha! How learnt he it? It was to one who hath long been in his grave I told it—so long ago, it had passed from my memory. ’Tis strange—Reginald hath a brother I know; but there is no other of the house.”

“There is a cousin—Eleanor Mowbray.”

“Eleanor Mowbray! Ha! I see, a daughter of that Eleanor Rookwood, who fled from her father’s roof. Fool, fool; am I caught in mine own toils? Those words were words of truth and power, and compel the future and ‘the will be,’ as with chains of brass. They must be fulfilled, but not by Ranulph. He shall never wed Eleanor.”

“Whom then shall she wed?”

“Sir Luke Rookwood.”

“Mother!” shrieked Sybil. “Dost thou say so? Oh! recall thy speech.”

“I may not; it is spoken. He shall wed her.”

“Oh God, support me!” exclaimed Sybil.

“Silly wench, be firm—it must be as I say. He shall wed her; yet shall he wed her not—the altar and the grave are but a step apart—the nuptial torch shall be quenched as soon as lighted—the curse of the avenger shall fall—yet not on thee—”

“Mother, I comprehend you not,” cried Sybil—“I would not comprehend you. If sin must fall upon some innocent head, let it be hurled on mine—not upon hers. I love him—I

Could gladly die for him. She is young—she is unoffending—perhaps happy. Oh, do not let her perish——”

“Peace, I say!” cried Barbara.

“There lives another, his brother,—think of that, dear mother!”

“It is in vain.”

“Oh, for my sake—for my martyr’d mother’s sake,” cried Sybil.

“Touch not that chord, girl,” said Barbara; “trifle not with thy mother’s name thus lightly. I owe it to her memory to look to thy advancement.”

“Advancement!” echoed Sybil, her voice stifled with sobs. “It will advance me to my grave. Oh, mother, lend not thine hand to sin.”

“To sin!” repeated Barbara; “to Fate. This is thy birth-day, Sybil. Eighteen summers have flown over thy young head—eighty winters have sown their snows on mine. Thou hast yet to learn. Years have brought wrinkles—they have brought wisdom likewise. To struggle with fate, I tell thee, is to wrestle with Omnipotence. We may foresee, but not avert our destiny—what will be, shall be. This is thy eighteenth birth-day, Sybil; it is a day of fate to thee; in it occurs thy planetary hour—an hour of good or ill, according to thine actions. I have cast thy horoscope; I have watched thy natal star; it is under the baneful influence of Scorpion, and fiery Saturn sheds his lurid glance upon it. Let me see thy hand—the line of life is drawn out distinct and clear—it runs—ha! what means that intersection? Have a care—beware, my Sybil, of thyself. Act as I tell thee, and thou art safe. I will make another trial, by the crystal bowl. Attend.”

Muttering some strange words, which sounded like a spell, Barbara, with her divining rod, described a circle upon the floor; within the circle she drew other lines, from angle to angle, forming seven triangles, the bases of which constituted the seven sides of a septilateral figure. This figure she studied intently for a few moments; she then raised her wand, and touched the owl with it. The bird unfolded its wings, and arose in flight—then slowly circled round the pendulous globe. Each time it drew nearer, until at length it touched the glassy bowl with its flapping pinions.

“Enough,” ejaculated Barbara.

The bird stayed its flight, and returned to its perch.

Barbara arose. She struck the globe with her staff. The pure lymph instantly became tinged with crimson, as if blood had been commingled with it. The little serpent could be seen within, coiled up and knotted, as in the struggles of death.

“Again, I say, beware,” ejaculated Barbara solemnly.

“This is ominous of ill.”

Sybil had sunk, from faintness, on the pallet. A knock was heard at the door.

"Who is without?" cried Barbara.

"Tis I, Balthazar;" replied a voice.

"Thou may'st enter," answered Barbara; and an old man with a long beard, white as snow, and a costume which might be said to resemble the ephod of a Jewish High Priest, made his appearance.

"I come to tell you that there are strange women within the Priory," said the Patrico, gravely, "I have searched for you in vain," continued he, addressing Sybil; "the younger of them seems to need your assistance."

"Women!" exclaimed Barbara. Whence come they?"

"They have ridden, I understand, from Rookwood," answered the Patrico. "They were on their way to Davenham, when they were prevented."

"From Rookwood," echoed Sybil—"their names—did you hear their names?"

"Mowbray is the name of both;—they are a mother and a daughter—the younger is called—"

"Eleanor?" asked Sybil, with an acute foreboding of calamity.

"Eleanor is the name, assuredly," replied the Patrico, somewhat surprised.

"Gracious God! She here," exclaimed Sybil.

"Here—Eleanor Mowbray here," cried Barbara. "Within my power—not a moment is to be lost. Balthazar, hasten thee round the tents—not a man must leave his place—above all, Luke Bradley. See that these Mowbrays are detained within the Abbey. Let the bell be sounded. Quick, quick—leave this wench to me—she is not well. I have much to do. Away with thee, man, and let me know when thou hast done it. And as Balthazar departed on his mission, with a glance of triumph in her eyes, Barbara exclaimed, "Soh, no sooner hath the thought possessed me, than the means of accomplishment appear. It shall be done at once—I will tie the knot—I will untie, and then retie it. This weak wench must be nerved to the task," added she, regarding the senseless form of Sybil. "Here is that will stimulate her," opening a cupboard, and taking a small phial—"this will fortify her; and this," continued she, with a ghastly smile laying her hand upon another vessel, "this philter shall remove her rival when all is fulfilled—this liquid shall constrain her lover to be her titled, landed husband. Ha! ha!"

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